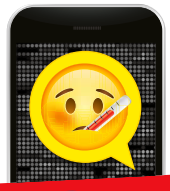

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Superb NEW ways to stream & download – watch ANYTHING, ANYTIME, ANYWHERE!

- ☑ Download Netflix series
- ☑ Unlock Freeview channels
- ☑ Skip all advert breaks
- ☑ Cancel your subscriptions
- ☑ Watch TV without an aerial

+ Best new TV & films – all 100% FREE!

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From the Editor

By ditching old TV habits, we don't mean picking your nose with your remote control. Instead it's easy to get stuck into a routine – watching the same shows on the same channels on the same devices.

But with the exception of AI, there's currently no area of technology evolving faster than TV streaming and downloads. There's been such a rush recently of fantastic new channels, devices, apps and features that we felt it was vital to cover them.

All the leading services are there (BBC iPlayer, Freeview, ITVX, Netflix, Plex, YouTube etc) plus some you may not know (Talking Pictures, Tubi). You'll learn fresh ways to download entire series, unlock new channels, upgrade your devices and skip advert breaks. Each one is a new habit waiting to be adopted.

On another note, while exploring the *Computeractive* attic we found a batch of 2021 and 2022 Back Issue CDs. We're considering selling them to readers at a discount, but want to gauge how much demand there is. Please email us if you're interested.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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10,000
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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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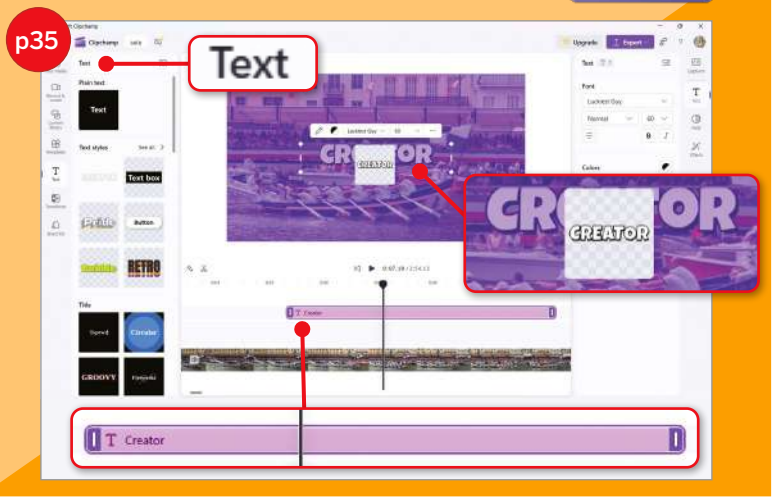

DITCH YOUR OLD TV HABITS

COVER FEATURE P50

Superb NEW ways to stream & download – watch ANYTHING, ANYTIME, ANYWHERE!

- Download Netflix series
- Unlock Freeview channels
- Skip all advert breaks
- Cancel your subscriptions
- Watch TV without an aerial
- Best FREE TV & films

Is your phone screen MAKING YOU ILL?

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Call in sick

New version of Flyby11 beats Microsoft's security block

The developer of a tool that lets your computer beat Windows 11's restrictions to install the operating system has released a new version after Microsoft's security software blocked the program.

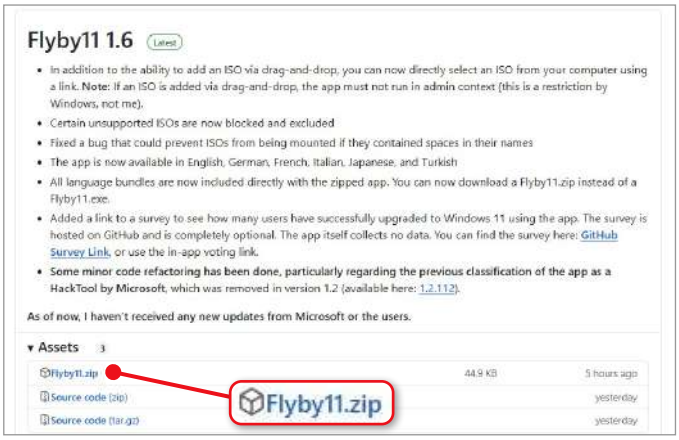
Flyby11 uses the installation setup designed for Windows Server, which businesses use to run Windows across a network of computers.

Windows Server doesn't check whether a computer has the correct technical specifications for running Windows 11. Flyby11 exploits this loophole to install the system on machines even if they lack Secure Boot or the TPM 2.0 processor.

On 1 February, Flyby's developer Belim said that Windows Defender was flagging version 1.1 of the program as a PUA (Potentially Unwanted Application).

PUAs aren't necessarily malware but can harm your computer by making it run slower, showing intrusive adverts or installing extra software without your permission.

Within a few days Defender had stopped blocking Flyby11 and reclassified it as a 'HackTool'. These are tools that can modify or bypass system restrictions, licensing protections or security settings.


Flyby11 1.6
Latest
In addition to the ability to add an ISO via drag-and-drop, you can now directly select an ISO from your computer using a link. Note: If an ISO is added via drag-and-drop, the app must not run in admin context (this is a restriction by Windows, not me).
Certain unsupported ISOs are now blocked and excluded
Fixed a bug that could prevent ISOs from being mounted if they contained spaces in their names
The app is now available in English, German, French, Italian, Japanese, and Turkish
All language bundles are now included directly with the zipped app. You can now download a Flyby11.zip instead of a Flyby11.exe.
Added a link to a survey to see how many users have successfully upgraded to Windows 11 using the app. The survey is hosted on GitHub and is completely optional. The app itself collects no data. You can find the survey here: GitHub Survey Link, or use the in-app voting link.
Some minor code refactoring has been done, particularly regarding the previous classification of the app as a HackTool by Microsoft, which was removed in version 1.2 (available here: 1.2.112).
As of now, I haven't received any new updates from Microsoft or the users.
Assets 3
Flyby11.zip
44.9 KB
5 hours ago
Source code (zip)
yesterday
Source code (tar.gz)
yesterday
Flyby11.zip

Belim responded to Microsoft's actions by releasing several new versions of Flyby, which he says don't get flagged at all by Defender.

Belim, who's based in Germany, has now released version 1.6 – though he works quickly so there may be an even newer version by the time you read this.

Computer active
NEVER LOSE WI-FI
BREAK WINDOWS' WORST RULES
Do what Microsoft REALLY doesn't want you to – take back control!
STOP USING PASSWORDS ON YOUR PHONE & TABLET
BACK UP & PRINT YOUR TEXT MESSAGES

To download it, visit www.snipca.com/53833, then click the 'Flyby11.zip' file (see screenshot above) under the Assets heading and extract the contents.

For full instructions on installing Flyby11 read Issue 703's Cover Feature 'Break Windows' worst rules' (pictured left) – buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53843.

WHAT WE THINK

Microsoft's decision to block Flyby11 doesn't surprise us. After all, it recently updated its website (www.snipca.com/53836) to urge people who had bypassed Windows 11's requirement to "roll back to Windows 10 immediately". But that's shameful scaremongering. Yes, ignoring requirements carries risks, but Flyby11 is a trustworthy tool for those prepared to take the chance. Don't let Microsoft put you off trying it.

Microsoft adds more pinned apps to Start menu

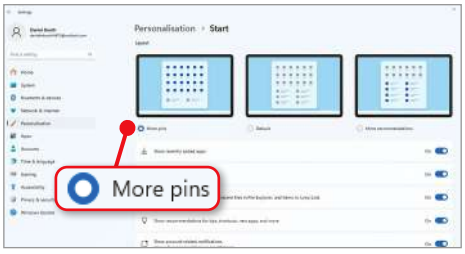
Microsoft is testing a feature that shows all your pinned apps on the first page of the Start menu, potentially cutting the amount of scrolling and clicking you'd have to do to see all your favourite apps.

Windows Insiders spotted a 'Show all pins by default' option in a preview build of Windows 11.

Currently, you have to click 'More pins' in Windows Settings to show more apps on the Start menu, but they spill on to the next page if you have too many.

Turning on the new option doesn't make any changes yet, so it's not known how Microsoft will find room to fit more pinned apps. Shrinking the app icons or making the Start menu taller are two possibilities.

To turn on 'More pins' press Windows key+I, then click Personalisation followed by Start. Select the option at the top (see screenshot).



You'll like this... Microsoft will redesign Clipchamp to make editing videos even easier (www.snipca.com/53834)

but not this... Microsoft wants Copilot to load on your PC in the background (www.snipca.com/53835)

Map shows when (or if) you'll get gigabit broadband

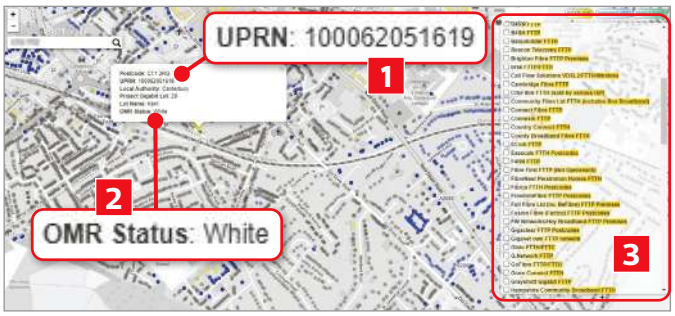
A new map shows whether your home will get fast broadband under the Government's £5bn Project Gigabit scheme.

The map, from the website Thinkbroadband, uses 30 million Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRN) covering England and Wales. Updates for Scotland and Wales are planned.

It lets you zoom into street level, and uses coloured dots to indicate how soon you could be upgraded to gigabit (1Gbps) broadband.

Grey or black dots mean providers already offer gigabit or plan to do so within three years. Yellow dots mean no gigabit network will be built in the next three years.

Blue dots are for premises that are 'under review', meaning no work has been confirmed, or there are risks to it being completed.



Thinkbroadband got the data from research conducted by the Government's Building Digital UK (BDUK) agency, which manages the rollout of broadband infrastructure across the country.

It uses public funding to subsidise broadband infrastructure where private investment alone would not be viable. These are properties marked with yellow dots on the map.

Find your home by visiting www.snipca.com/53798, then typing your postcode at the top left, pressing Enter and zooming into the map pin.

Click the dot on your home for confirmation of its status, as well as its UPRN (1 in our screenshot). Note that yellow dots have the official status white 2, which is the colour used by BDUK in its research. The menu on the right lets you filter results by broadband providers 3.

Project Gigabit aims to bring 1Gbps broadband to 99 per cent of the UK by 2030, which is up from the current 86 per cent.

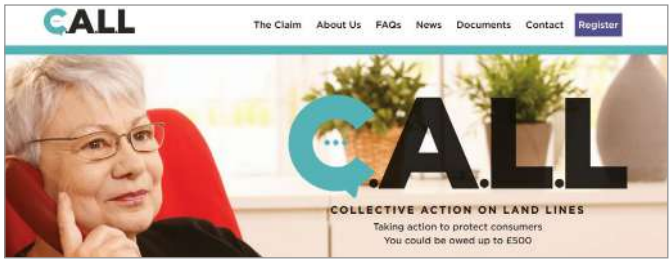
Have you got gigabit broadband yet? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

BT customers won't be compensated for 'overcharged' landlines

BT landline customers won't receive compensation after the Competition Appeal Tribunal rejected a claim that accused the company of overcharging them.

The case, led by the Collective Action on Land Lines (CALL, www.callclaim.co.uk, pictured), alleged that 2.3 million landline-only BT customers paid more than they should have between 2015 and 2018.

Law firm Mishcon de Reya, acting on behalf of former Ofcom consultant Justin Le Patourel, based the case on an Ofcom investigation in 2016 which found that – although the wholesale costs of providing landlines to customers had fallen by at least 25 per cent – BT had actually increased its fees by between 28 and 41 per cent.



It estimated that BT owed customers nearly £1.3 billion. But in December the Competition Appeal Tribunal dismissed Le Patourel's case, saying while BT's price rises were excessive, that didn't mean they were unfair.

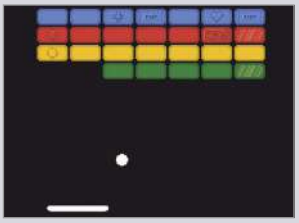
It also said that the company hadn't abused its "dominant position" in the telecoms market.

Le Patourel appealed, arguing that the tribunal had misinterpreted key legal principles, including cost-sharing and competition factors. But on 11 February judges threw out the appeal, saying it had no serious chance of succeeding.

IN BRIEF

PLAY BLOCK BREAKER GAME IN GOOGLE

Google has added a modern equivalent of the classic Atari game *Breakout* (pictured) to its search results. Type Block Breaker, press Play, then click your mouse or trackpad to start. Move your mouse or press the arrow keys to move the paddle left and right. You can share your score at the end. It works on PCs and phones.



MICROSOFT UPDATES MIDI AFTER 30 YEARS

Microsoft is working on the first major update to the digital music standard MIDI since 1983. It has released MIDI 2.0 to the Canary build of Windows 11, which is the earliest version for Windows Insiders to use. Canary features can take up to a year to reach the full version. Read more on Microsoft's blog: www.snipca.com/53805.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Welcome to series 87 of *Strictly Come Dancing*, starring the Unitree G1 robot. Researchers from the University of California in San Diego have taught it how to waltz based on videos of human movement (see www.snipca.com/53802). It's surprisingly graceful for a lump of metal. Even Craig would give it a high score.

IN BRIEF

AMAZON BRINGS AI TOOLS TO UK KINDLES

Amazon has updated its Kindle Scribe e-reader (pictured) in the UK to add some of the AI tools already available in the US. One feature summarises notes as bullet points, while another converts your handwriting into fonts. They're available in both the 2022 and 2024 editions of the Scribe. For our review of the latter see Issue 701, page 25.

OPENREACH TESTS FIRST 50GBPS CONNECTION

Openreach and Nokia have tested the UK's first "hyper-fast" 50Gbps broadband, fast enough to download an HD film in one second. The trial, held at a home in Ipswich, hit download and upload speeds of 41.9Gbps and 20.6Gbps respectively, though it won't be publicly available for many years. Read more at www.snipca.com/53791.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

If you ever doubt that online influencers are some of the world's stupidest people, here's Lil Golo knocked unconscious after trying to run through a barrier made of 1,000 duct tapes (www.snipca.com/53789). The Aussie said it's his "dumbest" stunt ever. It was almost his last.

Credit: Lil Golo/Instagram

Man who lost Bitcoin fortune wants to buy rubbish tip

A computer engineer who lost £620m worth of the cryptocurrency Bitcoin wants to buy the rubbish tip where he believes it's buried.

James Howells (pictured), from Newport, says his ex-girlfriend accidentally threw out a hard drive containing 8,000 Bitcoins in 2013.

He bought the cryptocurrency for almost nothing in 2009, but forgot about it when he stored the drive in a drawer after spilling a drink on it.

When the price of Bitcoin began to soar after 2013 he hired a team of experts to track down the drive on a local tip. He believes he's identified an area of 100,000 tonnes where it's located.

He has offered to pay to find it, but Newport City Council has repeatedly refused his requests.

In January, a judge dismissed his attempt to sue the council. He was seeking permission to search for it, or seek £495m in compensation.

But the council has now said it plans to close the tip in the 2025-26 financial year so it can build solar panels on the site to power its refuse lorries.

Mr Howells said: "The council planning on closing the landfill so soon is quite a surprise, especially since it claimed at the High Court that closing the landfill to allow me to search would have a huge detrimental impact on the people of Newport, whilst at the same time they were planning to close the landfill anyway."

He added he's discussed the option of buying the tip with his investment partners.

The value of Bitcoin has more than doubled in the past 12 months to around £78,500 per coin, giving Howells a lost fortune of over £620m.

Do you have any sympathy for James Howells? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Sky hikes prices by 6.2%, so check if you can cancel for free

Sky is raising its broadband and TV prices by an average of 6.2 per cent in April, but some customers will be able to cancel for free within 30 days.

The company claims this is the reason it can increase prices by a percentage rather than in 'pounds and pence', as stated in Ofcom's new rules.

Ofcom has confirmed that its rules are meant to address the uncertainty customers previously faced with price rises linked to future inflation, rather than ban mid-contract hikes entirely.

It added that if companies make "ad hoc announcements" about price rises, they must give customers 30 days to cancel. This is what Sky is doing.

However, only broadband and landline customers can cancel without a fee. TV customers won't be able to take advantage because streaming services like Sky Glass and Stream aren't covered by Ofcom's 'pounds and pence' regulations.

Sky is currently in a legal spat with Ofcom to also exclude Sky Q from the regulations.

The company has never linked its rises to inflation, and is now the only major provider to increase them by a percentage rather than a fixed amount.

The rise of 6.2 per cent is smaller than last year's 6.7-per-cent increase. How much more you'll pay will depend on what's included in your package.

Search in ChatGPT without having to sign into account

You can now search the web using ChatGPT without signing up for an account, making it a more plausible alternative to Google and Bing.

Previously, you had to create an account through OpenAI, the company that runs the hugely popular AI chatbot. You can do this by visiting https://chatgpt.com and clicking 'Sign up' at the top right.

You'll still need an account to save and share searches. You'll also need to log in to search by voice and to use 'customised' searches that reply in a particular style or tone.

It remains completely free to use – type into the box at the bottom and click Search (1 in our screenshot), then press Enter or click the arrow at the right.

ChatGPT's search results are summaries taken from websites – shown at the end and in the Sources button – rather than pages of links as on Google.

In our example, we searched for 'When does Windows 10 support end?' and it produced an accurate summary.

The links below and the icons in the Sources button show it got the information from tech websites and Microsoft's site 2. Searching without logging in works only on the PC version of ChatGPT. If you search on the ChatGPT app, you'll still need to sign in.

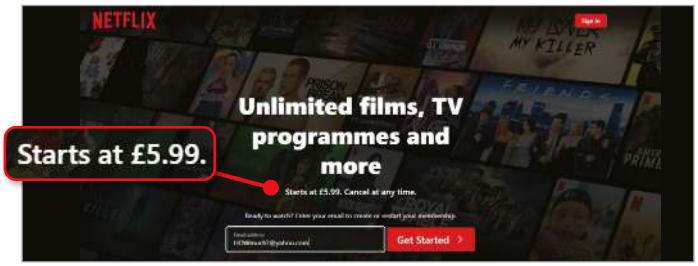
• Avoid this ChatGPT rip-off – page 21

BUY OUR CHATGPT BACK ISSUE

Issue 702's Cover Feature ('Why you must use ChatGPT', pictured) proved extremely popular – selling out in some areas of the UK. As a result we've increased the number of back issues available – see www.snipca.com/53680.

Netflix raises UK prices for all its subscribers

Netflix has raised prices for all UK subscribers, including for the first time those on the 'Standard with ads' package. The Standard plan is seeing the biggest jump, from £10.99 to £12.99. The 'Standard with ads' and Premium tiers both increase by £1 to £5.99 (see screenshot) and £18.99 respectively.



The prices apply to new subscribers straight away, while existing viewers will start paying more on their next billing date.

It comes soon after Netflix raised prices in several other countries, including the US, Canada and Portugal.

The last major rise was in October 2023 when Netflix increased the Premium tier by £2 to £17.99, and the Basic tier by £1 to £7.99.

Netflix scrapped the Basic offer last year, replacing it with 'Standard with ads'.

It has also changed the pricing for its Extra Member scheme, which lets subscribers share their account with people outside their household. A new option, priced £4.99 per month, shows adverts, while 'without adverts' increases by £1 to £5.99

Premium subscribers can add up to two extra members, while Standard plan subscribers can add only one.

Netflix added a record 19 million subscribers in the fourth quarter of 2024. It now has 302 million subscribers worldwide, up 41 million from 2023, including 17 million in the UK. See what each package gives you at www.snipca.com/53768.

• 'Forcing Netflix viewers to pay TV licence fee is mad' - page 12

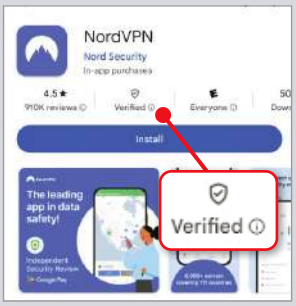
IN BRIEF

CASIO HACKERS STEAL PAYMENT-CARD DETAILS

Casio customers have been urged to change their account details after hackers broke into its UK store (www.casio.co.uk) and stole credit-card details and personal information. The attack took place between 14-24 January. Casio was informed on 28 January and removed the malware responsible.

GOOGLE ADDS 'VERIFIED' LABEL TO VPNs

Google is showing a 'Verified' label on its Play Store to indicate VPNs that "prioritise user privacy and safety". It will also help you avoid fake and dodgy VPNs. To earn the label VPNs must have been installed 10,000 times, received 250 reviews and been available for 90 days. Verified VPNs include Aloha, Hide.me and NordVPN (pictured).



MICROSOFT AXES VPN FOR 365 SUBSCRIBERS

Microsoft is removing the VPN from its 365 subscription. It was available as part of the company's Defender security suite but will be axed on 28 February. The company will instead prioritise tools that "better align to customer needs" – an admission that the VPN wasn't popular. Read more at www.snipca.com/53769.

Will foreign TV companies start blocking your VPN?

Legal action in France threatens your ability to watch anything from anywhere

A legal case brought by one of France's biggest broadcasters and the French football league could ultimately prevent you from watching your favourite US show through your VPN.

Canal+ has teamed up with Ligue de Football Professionnel in an attempt to force the likes of NordVPN, ExpressVPN, ProtonVPN, CyberGhost and Surfshark to block 'pirate' sites that illegally let viewers watch paid-for football matches for free.

It follows the broadcaster's successful case last year against DNS resolvers, including Cloudflare, Google and OpenDNS. These are services that turn URLs into IP addresses, and can be used to access content illegally. Canal+ argued that viewers were using them to watch football on their channels without paying for it. A Paris court ordered the services to block access to over 100 pirate sites.

THE FACTS

- French TV broadcaster Canal+ is taking legal action against VPNs in a bid to stop them providing access to sites that offer paid-for content for free
- Last year it won a case forcing DNS resolvers to block access to over 100 pirate sites
- VPNs say blocking access is technically impossible, and have attacked the case as an attack of internet freedom

> "Amazon, the BBC, Netflix and Sky will all be watching this legal case closely"

Spurred on by that win, Canal+ is now targeting VPNs, citing Article 333-10 of the French Sports Code. This allows rightsholders to demand "all proportionate measures" against those that are "likely to contribute to remedying" copyright infringement. In other words, it wants to do everything it can to stop VPNs giving illegal access to online content.

However, while DNS services didn't put up much of a fight, VPNs have responded angrily to the potential block. The VPN Trust Initiative (VTI), which represents many of the world's biggest VPNs, said its members "are not facilitators of piracy" and don't "host, store or promote copyrighted material" (www.snipca.com/53845).

Proton VPN, based in Switzerland, slammed the move as "a dangerous attack on internet freedom on the altar of corporate greed". It said Canal+ should focus on the piracy sites themselves, not the tools people use to bypass restrictions.

Privacy campaigners were also furious, arguing that VPNs are vital tools for journalists and activists to beat censorship. They see VPNs as essential for staying anonymous online. Others said that if the main services are blocked, users will flock to smaller, less reputable services that don't keep personal data secure.

But Canal+ will simply shrug off these moral objections. What's harder to dismiss are warnings that blocking VPNs is impractical and technically challenging. The VTI says it won't work because VPNs constantly change their server locations and IP addresses. It also argues that because VPNs operate globally, enforcing a block would require international cooperation. It's sceptical this will ever happen – and so are we.

However, this case is part of a wider trend of TV companies no longer turning a blind eye to practices that cost them money – and it goes beyond VPNs. Look at YouTube's crackdown on ad-blockers; Netflix stopping viewers sharing passwords for free; and UK police arresting people who sell Amazon Fire TV Sticks they've hacked to bypass sport subscriptions.

Amazon, the BBC, Netflix, Sky and other broadcasters will be watching the case closely. They've all tried to block VPNs accessing their content, but mostly through technical measures not legal action. Also, their motivation has mainly been to stop viewers beating geographical restrictions. Canal+ is taking a much tougher line by stressing that VPNs let viewers access pirated content.

If Canal+ wins, expect broadcasters in other countries to launch legal action with sporting authorities. They'll pressure VPNs to police piracy more rigorously, making it harder for viewers to watch what they like, when they like. If that happens, we may look back and think we were living in a golden age of unrestricted access without ever realising it.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Fake QR codes in email scams

What's the threat?

Scammers are increasingly using fake QR codes in emails to trick you. They were found in 12 per cent of email scams in the final three months of 2024. This is up from just one per cent in January to March, according to research from US security firm Vipre.

This attack, sometimes called 'quishing', tries to convince you that you need to scan a code to perform urgent tasks, such as confirming a payment or verifying your account. Doing so takes you to a fake website where the scammers will ask for your personal details.

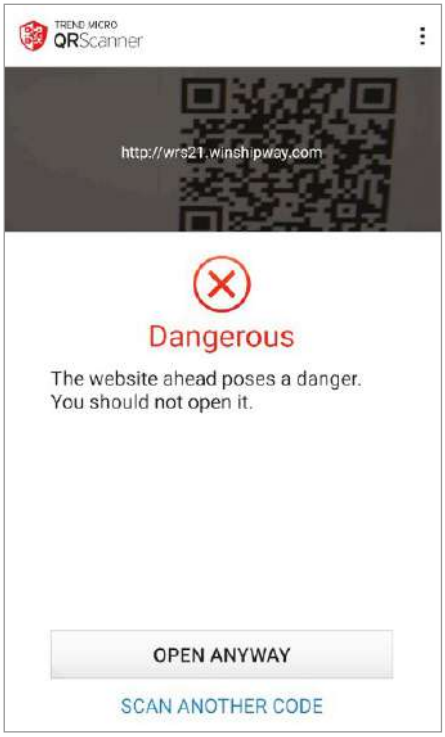
Vipre published its findings in its annual report on email security (www.snipca.com/53713), saying that 90 per cent of all emails received through its software was spam, whether malicious messages or merely unwanted email. The US was the top sender of spam, followed by the UK, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

How can you stay safe?

The top rule for avoiding fake QR codes is the same for any scam: be extremely suspicious about any unexpected email that asks you to perform an action.

Also, when you scan a code check the URL that appears on your screen looks genuine. The scanners built into Android and iOS do a reasonable job at blocking dodgy codes, but for better protection try Trend Micro's scanner. It's a standalone app for Android (www.snipca.com/53715, pictured), while for iOS it's built into the company's Mobile Security app (www.snipca.com/53717).

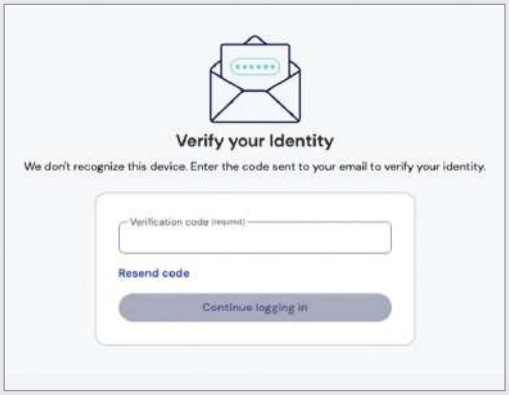
Lastly, bear in mind that while scammers are experimenting more with QR codes, they're still much more likely to use dodgy links and attachments in emails. Vipre said overall in 2024 fraudsters used links in 70 per cent of scams and attachments in 25 per cent.



New tools | Bitwarden's codes for 'unrecognised devices'

Many people dislike two-factor authentication. It can be a real hassle locating the device the code is being sent to, and then you have to type it before you get timed out. But it does add a layer of security to your accounts – and it's here to stay.

Bitwarden, our favourite free password manager, wants you to use two-factor authentication when accessing your password vault, but it's not compulsory. However, it *has* recently started to email codes that you'll need to enter if you try to sign in on an "unrecognised" device (see screenshot). You'll only get these emails if you don't have two-factor turned on in Bitwarden. If you do, then you'll receive codes as before.


Verify your Identity
We don't recognize this device. Enter the code sent to your email to verify your identity.
Verification code (required)
Resend code
Continue logging in

It defines an unrecognised device as one you've never used to sign into Bitwarden, or one you've cleared all cookies on – read more at www.snipca.com/53707. It gives instructions for setting up two-factor at www.snipca.com/53710.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

'Register to vote' email

In late January, I received an email supposedly from the Electoral Registration Officer saying that if I didn't prove my identity I wouldn't be able to vote. It asked for documents such as my passport, and came from the email address **electoral@register-to-vote.electoral.agency**. I used to work for my local council, Southend-on-Sea, so I knew that wasn't how they asked for proof of identity. In fact, I noticed the same day that the council had warned about the scam (www.snipca.com/53703). It said that genuine emails would come from **elections@southend.gov.uk** or would arrive by post.

Russell Woods

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Charging Netflix viewers to fund the BBC makes sense...

I accept that at first glance plans to force Netflix viewers to pay the licence fee might seem extreme ('Question of the Fortnight, Issue 703, pictured right), but many other countries impose charges or taxes on streaming services in order to fund well-established cultural institutions like the BBC.

France, for example, now charges music-streaming services a 1.2 per cent levy to help support the French music industry. This is on top of the two-per-cent 'YouTube tax' that TV-streaming companies have to pay – not just YouTube, but the likes of Netflix, Amazon and Disney+. Again, the money is channelled into French film and TV production.

Denmark also charges two per cent, while Spain goes even further, charging streaming services five per cent. Canada is considering something similar too.

The difference is that these levies are paid by the companies, not the viewers, which means you can still watch Netflix without having to pay for a state broadcaster. Personally, I think the BBC is so important to our national identity that it's reasonable to add the licence fee to Netflix and similar services.

Glyn Evans

...no it doesn't – it's completely mad!

Imagine that I preferred eating at Burger King to McDonald's, but was charged an extra 50p on every burger to keep the latter in business. Imagine I preferred shopping at Aldi to Lidl, but was charged an extra 50p at the till to keep the latter in business. Imagine I preferred reading *Computeractive* to any other technology magazine (which I do!), but I had to pay 50p extra to keep the latter in business.

You get my point. It would be unfair and mad. Yet apparently that's what's being considered as a solution to the BBC's so-called funding problem. Why should viewers who prefer the content on Netflix or Disney+ be punished for that choice to fund a broadcaster they no longer watch?

I stopped watching the BBC during the Covid lockdowns. It simply didn't offer me enough to justify the licence fee every year. I now subscribe to Netflix and Disney+, and haven't missed the BBC at all. I should stress that I have no desire to see the BBC vanish. I might even consider paying for a subscription package to watch certain channels, as long as it was cheaper than the current licence.

Edward Cannell

CA SAYS **We can't see the Government forcing viewers of streaming services to pay the licence fee, but we do think it'll look at new ways to fund the BBC when its charter is up for renewal in 2027. A subscription model might work, but it could prove too difficult to carve up all the BBC's different services into the kind of packages Netflix offers. More likely is a French-style levy that funnels money into the BBC and maybe other cultural organisations, not just broadcasters. And who knows – maybe Netflix's latest price rise (see page 9) will push viewers back to the BBC?**

Slashing broadband cables is futile climate 'vandalism'

If we manage to save the planet from the looming climate apocalypse, we'll look back at protestors slashing the broadband cables of UK insurance firms as the turning point (Issue 703, page 8).

I joke of course. This is a futile gesture that just irritates the average person who wants to live in a green future, but realises that damaging modern infrastructure isn't the way to guarantee this. They call it activism, but it's just vandalism, and it has no effect anyway. Most major companies have backup systems that take over when disruption happens.

Julian Chadwick

Microsoft should offer Windows version without updates

I totally agree with Mick Highsmith that Microsoft updates Windows too often (Star Letter, Issue 703). He suggests that an operating system which promised never to update would prove popular, and he's probably right.

Another option would be for Microsoft to offer two types of Windows: one which receives feature and security updates, and another that receives just the latter. I'd almost certainly choose the latter. I want my computer to be safe from threats, but don't want the hassle of dealing with all the changes that major updates bring.

Ryan Charles

People will use VPNs to get round porn age block

I read in Issue 702 (page 6) that Ofcom and the Government are

What's the Issue...?

I recall last year an intriguing feature on products you should never buy on Amazon. When was that?

Richard Ball

CA SAYS **Yes, that was in Issue 682, page 62.**

CA SAYS **In Issue 692, page 62.**

In which issue was your Cover Feature on removing duplicate files?

David Turner

I've just switched to BT Digital Voice but can't find your feature that highlighted the expert ways to use it. Can you help?

Linda Blunt

CA SAYS **That was Issue 677 – read it and the features above on our 2024 Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/53179.**

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finally going to implement measures to prevent under-18s from accessing sexual content. Here are the two questions that immediately sprung to my mind: what's going to be done about restricting Google Image/Video searches? If you've deliberately or accidentally searched for porn then it'll appear in the results, even if children won't be able to click through to the actual sites. And will people simply be able to access the restricted sites by using a VPN to pretend they're outside the UK?

I agree there are parts of the internet that children shouldn't be allowed to see, but I really can't see how this law will work. I reckon the sites affected will set up the measures being asked of them, but also list links to software that lets you bypass them!

Carlos Nicoya

Amazon should make a 'Talkbot' Alexa

I enjoyed Issue 702's Cover Feature on ChatGPT (pictured below). I can't believe how quickly it can respond to almost anything you ask. I've also been impressed by Google's Gemini AI tool. These chatbots are annoying when in the hands of a customer-support department who don't want us to speak to humans, but they're an incredibly fast and mostly accurate source of information.

But I'm curious as to whether Amazon has any plans for a chatbot. At home I 'talk' to Alexa on my Echo devices every day, but its spoken responses are more basic than the typed responses from chatbots. Several times in the past few months I've wanted ChatGPT to talk to me instead. Amazon should build a 'Talkbot' that brings the speed, intelligence and usefulness of ChatGPT to its smart speakers.

Ron Lester

CA SAYS That's crossed our mind too, and we might not have to wait long. Amazon has announced an event for 26 February to unveil a new version of Alexa powered by AI. Reports say it'll be able to engage in a conversation, not just provide single answers. But it might require a subscription – see www.snipca.com/53742. We'll cover it in our next issue. If you missed our ChatGPT Cover Feature, buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53680.

STAR LETTER

Windows 11 deserves to be more popular than 10

To misquote and paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of Windows 11's death are greatly exaggerated. In recent issues you've reported how Windows 10's market share has been creeping back up, reaching 62.7 per cent in December, while Windows 11 has been declining.

A month is a long time in computing though. I notice that in January Windows 11 hit a new high of 36.65 per cent, as measured by Statcounter (www.snipca.com/53746). Unsurprisingly, this comes at the expense of Windows 10, which has slumped to 60.33 per cent. Looks like those 24H2 problems haven't put people off.

I now expect Windows 11 to rocket in the next few months. It'll probably overtake 10 before support ends in October, and it deserves to. I bought a Lenovo laptop with Windows 11 installed last year expecting to be baffled by a new operating system, but it hits that sweet spot of being similar enough to Windows 10 to not scare anyone, but with enough new features to make you glad you upgraded.

The Snap Layouts feature alone is worth the upgrade. I've created several layouts for three tasks – email, video chatting and editing photos – each containing the required programs. It beats the chaotic way I handled programs in Windows 10. I've also been surprised by how useful Windows 11's widgets are. I just remember them being irritants in 10.

Gordon Phillipson

CA SAYS We're not convinced Windows 11 will overtake 10 by October, but we certainly agree it hits the sweet spot Gordon describes. And we've also been pleasantly surprised by how good the widgets are (see page 38). Despite 24H2's bugs, our advice remains that most people who upgrade won't regret it.

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Can I reinstall Windows if I don't like Linux?

Many thanks for Issue 702's 'Question of the Fortnight' on whether Microsoft has given up developing Windows 12. The stringent hardware requirements for Windows 11 meant some of my relatively modern computers became obsolete. I therefore decided to keep using my 10-year-old Windows 10 computer (from PCSpecialist), which is still working fine, until I knew what requirements Windows 12 would have. I was planning to skip Windows 11 and go straight to 12.

However, the clock is now ticking on Windows 10 support. My PC isn't getting any younger and I fancy a new mini PC. With the way Windows has gone in the past few years, I've decided to move to Linux. My wife switched to Zorin (https://zorin.com) a couple of years ago and apart from the minor niggle in not being able to print more than one copy at a time she has been delighted with the experience.

My new PC will no doubt come with Windows 11 installed. If I reformat the drive and install Linux Mint (https://linuxmint.com) but then decide that I want to go back to Windows, would I simply have to reinstall Windows? Would there be any licence problems?

Ian Henderson

CA SAYS There shouldn't be any problems reinstalling Windows if you don't like Linux. Your computer will probably remember your product key. If not, make a note of it before you install Linux. If you can't find it on your system, the free program ShowKeyPlus might help (www.snipca.com/46738).

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Can I get a refund for a desk lamp if I used a Lidl coupon to buy it?

LEAD CASE

Q In December, I won a Lidl 'Ten pounds off your shop' online coupon. In January, I used it to buy an £11.99 desk lamp with a built-in USB phone/tablet charger. Unfortunately, the charger didn't work, and the replacement Lidl sent was also faulty.

Lidl refused to repair this or send me another replacement, offering me a refund of just £3 cashback instead. If I'd paid cash for this lamp I know I'd have been entitled to a full refund, but are my rights affected because I bought it using a coupon?

Jenny Beady

A They might be – it depends on the coupon's terms and conditions. Legally, coupons are seen as an 'invitation to treat' but in themselves don't count as an offer. So a retailer can refuse to accept them unless by doing so it's in breach of unfair trading regulations.

Some retailers state that once a coupon has been used, it won't be replaced under any circumstances. But this doesn't cancel your right to a refund of any amount you spent above the cost of the coupon.

If Lidl was unable to repair the lamp a second time or replace it, then it was allowed to refuse to do either. However, under the Consumer Rights Act it can't refuse a refund just because part of the payment was made with a coupon. This means it had to refund Jenny the £1.99 she paid on top of the £10 coupon. In fact, by giving her £3 cashback it was more generous than it had to be.

But we still think it's poor customer service not to give Jenny a new £10 coupon to spend. We'll ask Lidl why it's refusing to do this.

CASE ONGOING

Who do I contact about a missing Amazon parcel?

Q Royal Mail recently delivered an Amazon parcel of mine to the wrong address. The photo evidence it showed me as proof of delivery isn't of my house. I've registered it as missing with Amazon, but it says it's been delivered. What can I do?

Lindsay Markham

A She needs to show the photo evidence to Amazon and ask it for a refund or replacement. To do this, click 'Returns & Orders' at the top of Amazon's homepage, then click the yellow 'Problem with order' button. Next, click 'Package didn't arrive' then add all the evidence you have. This can be screenshots of tracking information showing non-delivery as well as photos taken by the courier and any communication you had with it.

Once Lindsay has done this, Amazon can take up the matter with Royal Mail. She doesn't have a contract with Royal Mail so, strictly speaking, she's under no obligation to contact it again. But there's no harm giving the company a nudge. It might be able to find out what happened and re-deliver the item to her home.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Reader gets Argos refund within hours of our advice

We've rarely been able to report such a swift resolution to a case as Ken Brown's complaint against Argos (Issue 703). He bought a 15.6in Lenovo laptop from Argos' website and decided to pick it up in person rather than wait for delivery. However, when he opened the box, he found the laptop wasn't the one he'd ordered. It was missing specific functions, such as a backlit keyboard.

He returned the laptop within one hour of picking it up, but the manager refused to help him because he had opened the box. She also said he'd foregone his rights because he picked up the laptop rather than having it delivered.

Both excuses are total nonsense. We rang Ken to explain he was fully entitled to return the laptop under both the Consumer Contract Regulations and the Consumer Rights Act. Then, a few hours later, he returned to a different Argos store, armed with the legal information we provided him. Thankfully, that store was run by a manager who did understand consumer law. They apologised, and gave him a full refund.

We're glad Ken got his refund so quickly, but we're still amazed that the original Argos store manager was so ignorant of consumer rights.

Can I cancel unwanted goods 'in transit'?

Q In November, I spent £27.46 on a Wi-Fi extender from WiFiBlast (https://mywifiblast.com, pictured). It didn't arrive on time, and when I tried to cancel, the company refused. It said the extender was in transit and I had to refuse delivery to get a refund. Was it right to refuse my initial cancellation?

John Sherwood

A No, it wasn't. The Consumer Contract Regulations make it clear that you can cancel an order even if it's on its way to you (ie, in transit). The retailer then has to decide whether to cancel the courier, or leave it up to you to refuse delivery on the doorstep. Either way, it might ask you to pay a fee for returning the items, even if you don't physically do this yourself.

WiFiBlast told John he can refuse delivery and get a full refund. He did this, but despite emails to the company he's never received a refund. He then filed a chargeback with his bank, which returned the payment. Hopefully, WiFiBlast won't challenge this. If it does, John should ask the bank to reinstate the refund. If it refuses, he should report it to the Financial Ombudsman Service (www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk).

CASE CLOSED

Can Samsung reduce my refund if I reject phone?

Q As a loyal Samsung smartphone user for over 15 years, I was accustomed to the company's 14-day return policy, which allows customers to return a device. However, upon buying the Samsung S25 Ultra (pictured), I was surprised to learn that merely turning on the phone qualified as 'using' it, leading Samsung to propose a 20-per-cent deduction from the refund. Is this legal?

Harry Bale

A We'd argue that it isn't. The Consumer Contract Regulations allow retailers to deduct a 'reasonable' amount from a refund if they think goods have been used beyond what's necessary to check them, and therefore can't be resold as new.

But we think turning on a phone, tablet, PC or laptop *should* count as being necessary. It certainly shouldn't count as 'use', unlike say downloading software, making calls or sending messages.

Furthermore, we suspect Samsung would be able to sell a phone that's been turned on only once for close to the full price. If so, then we think slashing the refund by 20 per cent is unfair.

If Harry agrees, he can complain to the

Competition and Markets Authority: www.snipca.com/53787. In the meantime, we'll ask Samsung to confirm and clarify its terms.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

EE store organised our broadband switch from BT

I was confused about how to switch my broadband from BT to EE, so I decided to visit our local EE shop in Tiverton, Devon. They were already aware of the problems I'd had. Within 40 minutes, we'd sorted out our four phone contracts (already with EE), and completed the switch to EE for broadband.

We also received a reduction in what we pay overall. This included a new 12in tablet with a data card.

The broadband equipment arrived the

next day. It included the hub and another device called Smart Hybrid Connect (pictured), which replaces our BT Mini Hub and switches to 4G should the broadband go down. Our broadband speed has increased from 167Mbps to 272Mbps. Thanks to everyone in the EE store for helping us.

Chris Adam

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
EE

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- **General enquiries** 0800 956 6000

Grow Your Family Tree

One of the most important records of recent years is now available to more people. Follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

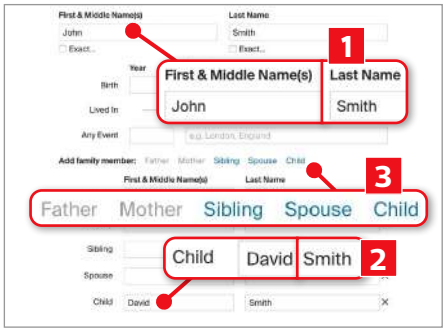
Search the 1921 census on Ancestry

First released by Findmypast in early 2022, the 1921 England and Wales census is now also available to search on Ancestry. You'll need a paid-for subscription, though the 14-day free trial might give you long enough to explore the census – sign up at www.snipca.com/53733. It was the first census to be carried out after World War 1, and the first that included British citizens in overseas RAF bases. It also included details of employment (not just occupation) and place of work for the first time.

Find related people in same household

Findmypast presents the census as one collection (www.snipca.com/53731), while Ancestry splits it into four: England (www.snipca.com/53727), Wales (www.snipca.com/53728), Isle of Man (www.snipca.com/53729) and Channel Islands (www.snipca.com/53730). Scotland had a separate census in 1921, which you can search on Scotland's People (www.snipca.com/53759). Ireland missed 1921 because of the Anglo-Irish War, catching up in 1926 with a census that's due to be released in 2027.

Ancestry licensed the 1921 census transcripts from Findmypast so you'd expect the data to be identical, but there



In Ancestry's 1921 census records you can search for multiple people who lived in the same household

are some differences. These might be the result of Findmypast updating the data following corrections from members, but not passing on these changes to Ancestry.

There are differences too in the search options. Where Findmypast lets you select a birth town, county or country, Ancestry groups all this information under 'birth location'. But the main difference is Ancestry lets you specify relationships between people in the same household, narrowing your search results.

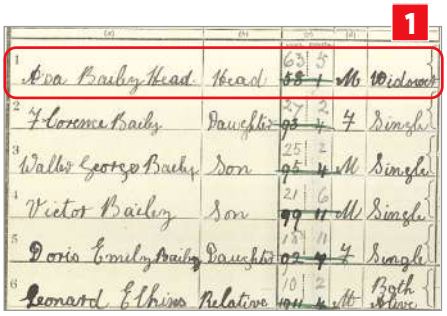
For example, if you search only for John Smith, you'll get thousands of results. But if you search for John Smith *and* David Smith – and specify that David is John's child – then you'll narrow your results to households where that applies.

As our screenshot left shows, we typed John Smith as the main name 1, and David Smith in the child field 2. If we wanted more precise results, we could add names in the other relative fields. You can add more boxes for family members by clicking the relevant link 3.

Use wildcard searches to find mistranscribed records

I knew my 3x Great-Grandfather Asa Bailey is in the 1921 census, but I couldn't find him. I wondered if his name had been written down incorrectly, so refined my search using the wildcard A* Bailey and adding the birth location 'Buckinghamshire, England'. This identified the correct entry (see screenshot 1 below), and showed my hunch was correct: 'Asa' had been mistakenly transcribed as 'Ada' 2.

1



Richard found his 3x Great-Grandfather after using a wildcard search...

2

Name	Ada Bailey
Gender	Male
Marital Status	Widowed
Age	63 Years 5 Months
Relation to Head	Head
Estimated Birth Year	1858
Birth Place	West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, England

...and discovered that 'Asa' had been incorrectly transcribed as 'Ada'

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I use Ancestry to create my family tree and would like to know if there is a way to create a timeline of records and events for specific people.

Phil Jones

When you view an individual's profile, Ancestry shows a Timeline containing all the information you've added. You can also 'filter' and 'add' facts or events.

The 'add' button opens a dropdown menu, including the option to add a 'Custom Event'.

Clicking the LifeStory tab under the name opens a timeline, where you can see more information – including maps and images.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search criminal records

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Anne Bird, Bristol

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Mr & Mrs Barber, Wells

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

SOFTWARE UNINSTALLER

Uninstalr 2.6

www.snipca.com/53830
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

When we last reviewed Uninstalr, back in Issue 682 (page 18), we were sceptical of its developer's boast that it's the "best uninstaller for Windows". Following a new blog post reiterating that claim (www.snipca.com/53831), he has now released a new version that better justifies his assertion.

Rather than just present a list of your installed programs, Uninstalr thoroughly scours the Windows registry and system folders for software data. This means its scans take a few minutes, but also yield more comprehensive results than rival uninstallers. They include standard desktop programs, Microsoft Store apps, built-in Windows tools and leftovers from software that hasn't been properly uninstalled.

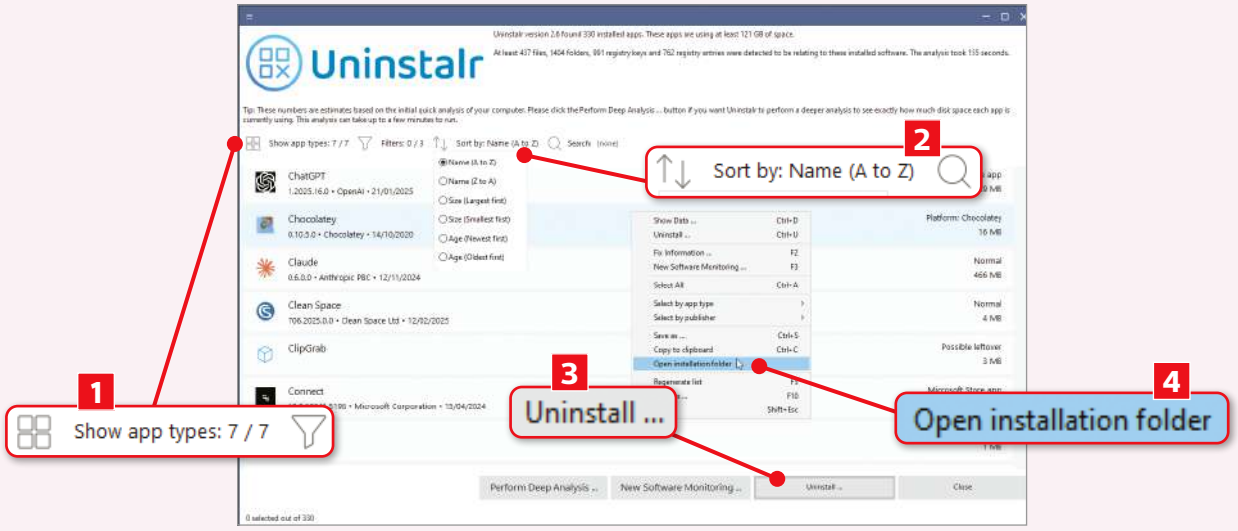
Uninstalr 2.6 speeds up these scans and expands them to find traces of portable programs and installation files in "unusual locations". On our PC, it found leftovers from software we removed years ago and from portable tools (such as Rufus) that were never technically installed.

The new version fixes Uninstalr's previously annoying habit of creating a system restore point every time you uninstall software. Click the menu button and choose Settings, then scroll down to 'General user interface settings'. Either untick the option 'Attempt to create a System Restore Point before uninstallation' or leave it ticked and choose 'But only once per session'.

Other improvements include clearer presentation of information about your installed software, and the option to export that data as a text file. Simply click the menu button and choose 'Save as'.

Uninstalr still isn't perfect – every time it searches for program data, it performs a full, time-consuming scan, and its thorough uninstallation process can test your patience. To speed things up, go to Settings then 'Leftover scanning mode'. Tweak the settings to analyse only common leftover paths and ignore the registry and specific folders.

Uninstalr's installer triggers a Microsoft SmartScreen warning, but it's completely safe to use so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.



1 Filter Uninstalr's scan results by clicking the 'Show app types' button and deselecting the types of software you want to exclude. To include Microsoft tools in results, click the Filters button and untick 'Don't list anything from Microsoft'.

2 Uninstalr lists your installed software alphabetically, but you can change this to suit your needs. Click the 'Sort by' button to reorder the list by size, with the largest or smallest items first, or by age with the oldest or newest programs first.

3 By default, Uninstalr closes all running programs and reboots your PC to completely uninstall software. To stop this happening, untick the boxes for those options after you click the Uninstall button, but before you click Start Uninstallation.

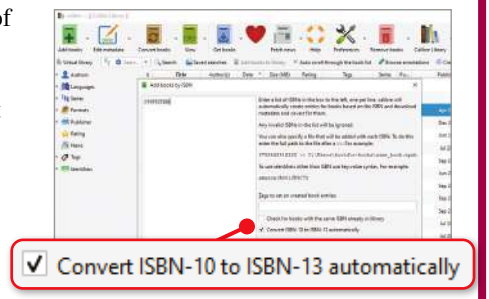
4 Uninstalr now shows you the paths of the folders it's analysing when it scans your hard drive for software. To see the folder where a particular program or app is stored, right-click it in the results list and choose 'Open installation folder'.

EBOOK MANAGER

Calibre 7.25

www.snipca.com/53818

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



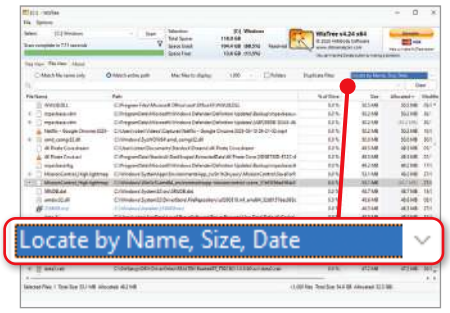
The latest version of this brilliant free ebook manager introduces support for MTP (Media Transfer Protocol). This file-transfer method is used by Amazon's latest Kindle e-readers, including the Kindle Paperwhite we reviewed in Issue 698 (page 26). It means you can now import ebooks in KFX format to your Calibre library by connecting your new Kindle to your PC with a USB cable. Calibre has also improved its option for downloading cover artwork and metadata for books by entering their ISBNs. When you enter an ISBN-10 code, it can now convert it to the newer ISBN-13 format. To use this feature, click the arrow next to the 'Add books' button and choose 'Add from ISBN'. Type or paste the ISBN-10 code, tick 'Convert ISBN-10 to ISBN-13 automatically' (see screenshot) and click OK.

DISK-SPACE ANALYSER

WizTree 4.24

www.snipca.com/53811

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11



WizTree offers a speedy way to analyse the contents of your hard drives, so you can see which files and folders take up the most space. Version 4.24 improves the duplicate detector, which was added to the program last year. When you scan for duplicate files (by clicking the File View tab, then Scan) WizTree will show results that have matching names, sizes and dates (see screenshot) – previously it only matched the first two. Click the plus sign next to a result to view details of its copy and delete it if required. WizTree has also changed the way it displays disk usage. By default, it now uses an 'allocated' percentage rather than a size percentage, to show you the proportion of drive space used by each item. Additionally, WizTree now conceals drives that are hidden by Group Policy Editor in Windows.

£ SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Adobe Firefly

www.snipca.com/53821

Price: From £9.98 per month

Free trial: Complimentary credits

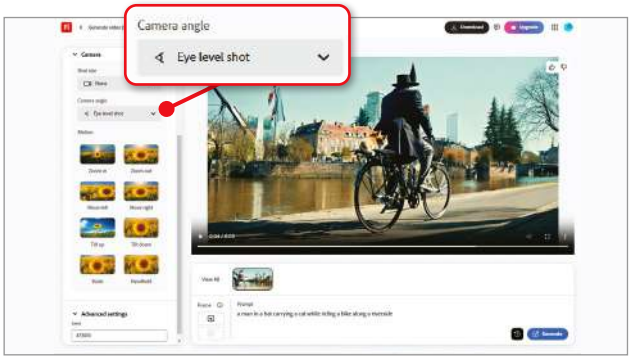
What you need: Adobe account

The web is now awash with so-called 'AI slop' (poor-quality content), but Adobe Firefly is one of the better tools for generating realistic images from text prompts. It has now introduced a video-creation option called Generate Video, along with two new monthly subscription plans.

Firefly Starter currently costs just under £10 a month, though the price will increase after 15 March. It gives you unlimited access to Adobe's 'Text to Image' tool, which creates impressively high-quality pictures from your descriptions. This feature is free to try on the Adobe website, but you can only download low-resolution versions of the results.

The new Generate Video option is also free to try – until you run out of 'complimentary' credits. Adobe doesn't specify how many you get, but we were able to create and download only two lo-res videos. With a Firefly Starter subscription you get 2,000 credits, which lets you produce and save 20 five-second videos at 1080p resolution. Firefly Pro (£29 a month) increases these limits to 7,000 credits and 70 videos.

As well as entering text prompts, you can upload a picture to use as the first frame of your video. You can also control the angle and movement of the camera – such as whether to use close-ups or long shots, zoom in or out, and shoot from above or at eye level (see screenshot).



OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

A tenner a month is quite expensive for short videos, but Adobe Firefly produces higher-quality results than most rival (and even pricier) tools. In addition to unlimited image generation, you get 100GB of online storage and six minutes of AI audio translation, so it's a pretty good bargain.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How can I back up to a hard drive?

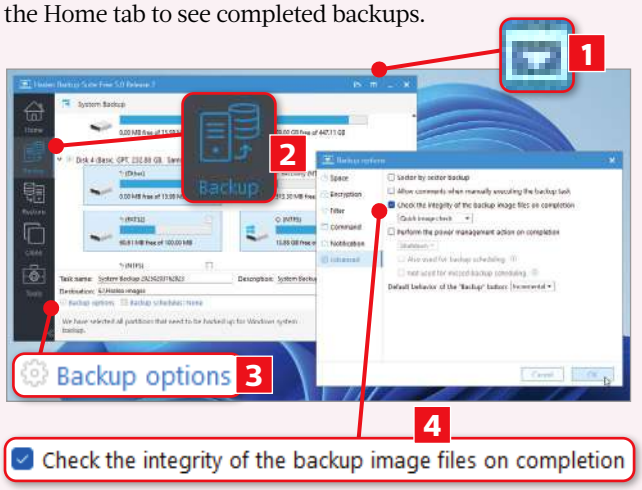
Q I need software to manage routine backups to an external hard drive. I prefer not to run backups online, and for so many products this is the default location – and sometimes the only one. What should I use to back up to my external drive?

Jan Forbes

A Our favourite backup tool is currently Hasleo Backup Suite, which released version 5.0 in late 2024 (www.snipca.com/53669 – see Issue 703, page 18). It can back up individual files and folders as well as entire drives. After installation, open the program and click the menu button (1 in our screenshot) to choose Settings, where you'll be able to specify your external drive as the default location for your backups. Once that's done, click OK and select Backup 2.

Now choose your type of backup: System Backup (back up your Windows installation); Disk/Partition Backup (back up an entire hard drive); or File Backup (select specific files or folders to backup). You can create multiple backup tasks, and mix and match types.

Click 'Backup options' 3, where we recommend ticking the 'Check the integrity of the backup image files on completion' box 4 under Advanced to make sure your backups were created without error. Now click 'Backup schedules: None' to set backups to run automatically on a regular basis. You can mix complete (full) backups with partial (incremental or differential) ones. After setting a schedule, click Proceed to make your first backup. Click the Home tab to see completed backups.

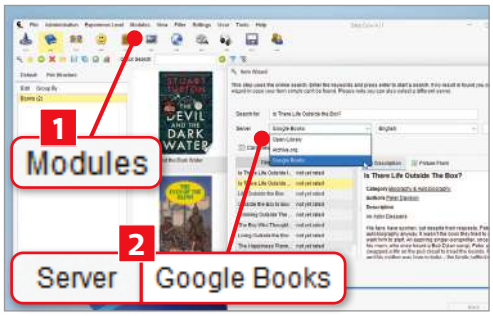


How can I catalogue my collection of 1,000 books?

Q I need a free and simple database program to catalogue more than 1,000 books. It must support at least 10 fields, including Catalogue Number, Category, Author, Publication Date, Value, Condition and more. I'd like to search my books using the first three fields. It should have two additional fields that let me import a limited amount of free text and images.

Richard Kelly

A Try free database software DataCrow (https://datacrow.org). It has a Books feature with most of the fields you need. You can add missing ones with the help of the Alter Modules Wizard in the Modules menu (1 in our screenshot).

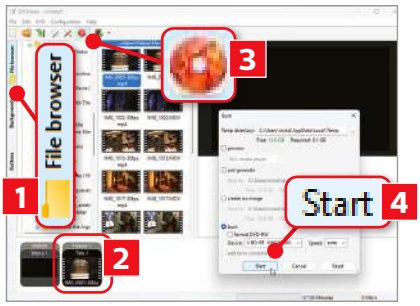


You can enter books manually, or use an online database 2 to quickly import details before adding any missing information yourself.

Can I convert an online stream to DVD?

Q A recent funeral service was streamed online and later available as a video as an MP4 file. How can I convert it to a DVD so I can play it on a DVD Player?

Norman Hinchliffe



A You can create a video from MP4s using the free DVDStyler (www.dvdstyler.org). Start a new project from the 'Welcome' instructions, then choose an aspect ratio (16:9 for widescreen). Click 'No template' on the next screen, then select the File Browser tab (1 in our screenshot) to load your MP4 file 2. Finally, click the burn button 3 followed by Start 4 to burn your disc. This should play in any DVD player.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Copycat AI tool impersonating ChatGPT

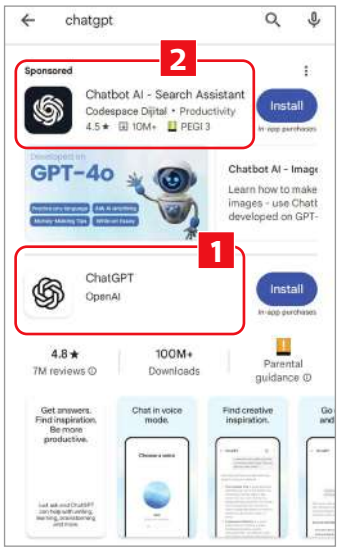
ChatGPT is being paid the ultimate compliment – a wave of awful copycat apps that try to trick people into using them. I spotted this one when I searched for the AI tool on the Google Play Store.

It returned ChatGPT as I expected (1 in our screenshot right), but my eye was drawn first to a 'sponsored' app above called 'Chatbot AI', with a suspiciously similar logo 2. It's clearly designed to catch out people who don't quite know what they're searching for, but have a vague sense that it begins with 'Chat' and has a logo that looks like a futuristic type of pasta.

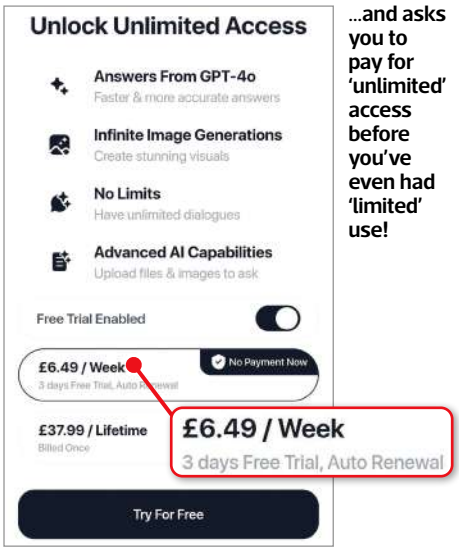
I installed it ready to be appalled, and sure enough was immediately bugged to "unlock unlimited access" by paying £6.49 a week (see screenshot far right). This was before I'd even enjoyed any "limited" access!

I clicked 'Try For Free', but it wanted my payment details before granting a three-day trial. I entered these, curious to see whether it warranted the 4.5-star rating it had somehow earned on the Play Store. But no. It doesn't do anything that you can't do in ChatGPT – or other tools like Claude (https://claude.ai) – for free. It's made by Codespace Dijital, a Turkish firm that I wouldn't touch with a barjepole.

ChatGPT, on the other hand, is one of the most exciting tools I've ever used, and will transform computing – and my *Computeractive* colleagues agree (see Issue 702's Cover Feature, www.snipca.com/53680). Don't bother searching for it though – the web is swarming with useless knock-offs. Instead install it safely from www.snipca.com/53701.



Similar name, similar logo: 'Chatbot AI' is a shameless rip-off...



...and asks you to pay for 'unlimited' access before you've even had 'limited' use!

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

Credit: Microsoft

WHAT THEY SAY

Nancie Gaskill, Microsoft

www.snipca.com/53685

"As organizations look to the future, accessing and unlocking value through both the cloud and endpoints will become a cornerstone of every AI strategy. Combining the scalability of cloud compute with the efficiency of local AI compute through powerful Neural Processing Units (NPU) with a groundbreaking new category of PCs: Copilot+ PCs."

WHAT THEY MEAN

I've reached the endpoint in my ability to compute what counts as plain English.

KEUMARS' VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

Zaki and Hanzalah Daudo

Credit: UK Finance Limited/City of London Police

The Information Commissioner's Office recently published advice on how to wipe sensitive data from your devices (www.snipca.com/53379), but it came too late for the Daudo brothers. These Leicester scammers – aged 34 and 46 respectively – were caught with more than 94,000 sets of stolen banking details on their phones and laptops, and used it to snatch £111,000 from victims.

Between 2019 and 2024 they posed as banking staff and convinced customers to reveal one-time passcodes sent by their bank. They then used these to make online purchases. Police said messages they sent to each other on social-media platforms contained victims' stolen data.

Both are now serving 25 months behind bars after pleading guilty to a conspiracy to commit fraud.

PC | **£538** from Laptops Direct www.snipca.com/53699

Lenovo ThinkCentre M70q Gen 4

Slimline tonic

Lenovo calls this model a tiny PC, but it's a different size and shape to those we're used to. It's still significantly smaller than a regular desktop PC, though, measuring 175x35x180mm (HxWxD) if you stand it on one of its long edges like a tower (see main image top right). All the external panels are metal, giving the whole unit a solid and sturdy feel.

> "An attractive, space-saving PC that performs well and offers plenty of connections"

It also packs in plenty of ports – one USB-C and two USB 3.2 on the front, and two more USB 3.2 and two USB 2.0 on the back. Also on the rear are both HDMI and DisplayPort connectors and a Gigabit Ethernet port (pictured right).

There's no memory card slot, but wireless options are decent, with 6GHz Wi-Fi 6E and Bluetooth 5.3 included. Unusually for a desktop PC, it comes with a basic but perfectly serviceable keyboard and mouse, along with the fittings you'd need if you wanted to mount the PC on to the back of a VESA-compatible monitor.

To get inside, you simply undo the large single Philips head screw at the back and slide the front/top section of the case forward. That gives you easy access to the fan for cleaning and the plastic 3.5in hard-drive bracket. Two plastic clips hold the fan assembly in place, making it very easy to remove if necessary.

Once inside, you'll also see an Intel Core i5-13400T (10-core, 16-thread) processor, along with 16GB of RAM and a 512GB SSD. The SSD proved to be a decent performer, recording sequential read and write speeds of 4,065MB/s and 2,470MB/s respectively. There's no room for a graphics card, so all the graphical tasks are handled by the UHD Graphics 730 hardware built into the processor. We wouldn't, therefore, recommend this to anyone who wants to play games like Microsoft Flight Simulator or carry out heavy-duty video- or image-editing work. For everyday office tasks and web browsing, however, the specification is more than enough.

When we pushed the processor hard in our benchmark tests, we heard the fans kicking in. While these aren't intrusively loud, they're clearly audible when running flat out, so this isn't the PC to choose if you're looking for a little peace and quiet while working.

Nevertheless, for the price you are getting plenty of ports, good levels of performance and an easy way to add more memory and storage. We also like the shape, which makes it easier to mount on a monitor or conceal than the more boxy designs.

If you do prefer a regular-sized mini PC, there are more options available. For slightly less, we recommend the GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro (£440 from www.snipca.com/52552, reviewed in Issue 697), which comes with a more powerful processor and has almost as many ports, even though the case is smaller.

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

SPECIFICATIONS

10-core Intel Core i5-13400T processor • 16GB RAM • Intel UHD Graphics 730 graphics • 512B SSD • 1x USB-C port • 4x USB 3.2 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Windows 11 Pro • 175x35x180mm (HxWxD) • One year warranty
www.snipca.com/53699

VERDICT A compact PC with an unusual design that's easy to upgrade, but there are standard mini PCs that offer better value for money

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro £440 A smaller PC with a faster processor for a little less money, though the build quality isn't as good

LAPTOP | **£799** from Currys www.snipca.com/53704

Acer Aspire Vero 16

Green fingers

Acer is clearly fully committed to the green credentials of its Vero line – this is the fifth laptop in the range we've reviewed and the first to come with a 16in screen. As with its predecessors, the Vero 16 is made from a chunky plastic formed from 60-per-cent recycled materials and has a speckled appearance.

We noticed some slightly rough edges, but overall it looks stylish and well-built. The 16in screen means it takes up a lot of desktop space – 360x247mm – and at 1.8kg it's not light. But if you can take it with you, it's robust enough to survive most environments, meeting MIL-STD-810H standards for durability, temperature, sand and humidity resistance, vibration, and drops of up to 1.22m, even if there's a little more flex than we'd like in the lid.

> "Eco-friendly laptop offers a bigger screen, excellent battery life and spacious keys"

The screen tilts back to a comfortable working position, lifting the back of the keyboard slightly off the desk as it does so. The larger dimensions mean you have room for two expansive palm rests either side of a good-quality plastic trackpad, beneath a spacious keyboard with a slim number pad.

Connectivity is basic, but you get two USB-C ports (though one is needed for charging) and two USB 3.2 ports. There's also an HDMI port for connecting to a monitor and a 3.5mm audio socket for headphones. Wi-Fi 6E is built in, which is quick enough for most home-office needs.

The screen has a 1920x1200-pixel resolution, which isn't quite enough to keep everything looking sharp on a panel of this size. Otherwise it offers decent specifications, with a maximum brightness level of 420cd/m², contrast ratio of 1266:1 and 83.5 per cent coverage of the DCI-P3 colour standard.

Performance is about what we'd expect with last year's Intel Core Ultra 7 155H processor, backed up with 16GB of RAM and 1TB of storage. It doesn't work quite as hard at the same chip in our current favourite Dell Inspiron 14 Plus (£799 from www.snipca.com/51831, reviewed in Issue 683) but it's not far off, and the larger screen explains the higher price.

It does have similarly excellent battery life, though, lasting over 15 hours in our video-playback test.

SPECIFICATIONS

Sixteen-core Intel Core 7 155H processor • 16GB RAM • Intel Xe graphics • 16in 1920x1200-pixel IPS screen • 1TB SSD • 2x USB-C ports • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 1x HDMI port • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Windows 11 Home • 16.5x360x247mm (HxWxD) • 1.8kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53704

LEFT EDGE

RIGHT EDGE

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A 16in version of Acer's environmentally friendly laptop range, but it doesn't work hard enough to dislodge our favourite

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Dell Inspiron 14 Plus £799 With a lower price it offers a slightly better performance from the same processor, but has a smaller screen

PRINTER | **£100** from John Lewis www.snipca.com/53723

HP Envy 6530e

High maintenance

HP's Envy 6530e is a compact all-in-one inkjet aimed at home users. It looks slightly different to most printers we've reviewed lately. There's the typical A4-sized scanning unit on the top, but a protruding 100-sheet paper tray that pulls out at the front. That means it takes up a little more desk space than you might like, but it's flatter overall than printers with sheet-feeders on their scanners.

> "A budget printer with most of the features you'll need, but it's costly to run"

Above the paper tray there's a lip where printed documents land, negating the need for a flimsy retractable paper catcher, and an upward-facing 2.4in colour touchscreen. It's an interesting design but we'd still prefer the extra desk space.

The included features are surprisingly comprehensive for a printer at this price. It can print, scan and copy; has a 35-sheet feeder on the top to make scanning of multi-page documents easier (as long as they're single-sided); and can print on both sides of a sheet automatically.

Interestingly, it's the first printer we've seen that can print on both sides of coated photo paper. This doesn't mean you can produce double-sided photos, but does let you print a simple label on the back of a photo, which could be useful in future when you want to identify when and where your pics were shot. This only works on 6x4in photo paper.

Disppointingly, the printer only comes with enough ink to print 120 black-and-white pages or 70 colour, which was barely enough to complete our tests. That means you're going to be buying more ink soon after purchase.

Direct from HP, the best-value cartridges work out at 10.3p per mono page and 12.4p per colour page, which is expensive. That's partly because the page count of replacement cartridges isn't particularly high, maxing out at 320 pages (black) and 120 pages (colour). Moreover, the Envy 6530e uses one black and one tri-colour cartridge, which will need replacing as soon as one colour runs out, regardless of how much is left of the others.

It's enough to make you seriously consider a subscription with HP's Instant Ink service, which might well be the intention. This could bring the price of prints down to around 5.5p per page (mono or colour), if you plump for the recommended Home plan and hit its target of 100 prints per month (for £5.49).

Print less than that and you end up paying more per page; over-print and you can carry over any deficit from the previous month, but any additional pages over and above that will cost a flat rate of 10p per sheet.

Print speeds are fairly sluggish, maxing out at 10ppm (pages per minute) in mono and 7ppm in colour. That said, the quality is impressive, with crisp, dark black text that looks precise and professional. The black ink is pigment-based, so is less likely to smudge and lasts longer.

Colour documents also look classy and really pop out if you print on glossy paper. The impressive brightness levels come at a small cost – there's less fine detail than the best photo printers can achieve, but the test snaps we printed looked bright and vivid, with precise colour accuracy.

Scanning is also slow, but accurate enough thanks to its relatively high resolution (1200x1200dpi), while the sheet feeder worked without any hitches during our tests.

SPECIFICATIONS

3-in-1 printer, copier and scanner • A4 size • Two-ink cartridge system (1 black, 1 tri-colour) • 100-sheet paper capacity • 1200x4800dpi print quality • 1200x1200dpi scan quality • Colour touchscreen • USB, Ethernet and Wi-Fi connections • 171x433x361mm • 6.1kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53723

VERDICT A decent set of features and good-quality prints, but best for lighter workloads given its slow speeds and expensive running costs

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-2830 £140 Similar set of features but much cheaper running costs thanks to its ink-tank system, with colour prints costing just 0.5p per page

PHONE | **£269** from Xiaomi www.snipca.com/53782

Xiaomi Poco X7 Pro

Quick to please

Chinese manufacturer Xiaomi sells its cheaper Android smartphones through its Poco brand. While this hasn't produced anything to rival our favourite phones for a while, it comes remarkably close with the X7 Pro. It has a few obvious trade-offs, but if you're looking for a bargain and are willing to compromise, it might be just what you're looking for.

> "A classy phone that's fast and has a gorgeous screen, but photos are a letdown"

It's equipped with the Mediatek Dimensity 8400 Ultra processor, which is backed up with 8GB of RAM and 256GB of storage, though you can upgrade to 12GB/512GB respectively for an extra £40. The processor provides the level of performance we were seeing from more expensive top-of-the-range phones towards the end of last year, and every app we tested ran like a dream, including games that use a lot of resources, like Microsoft Flight Simulator.

In our benchmark tests, it ran at nearly twice the speed of the Google Pixel 7a (£299 from www.snipca.com/53388, reviewed in Issue 660), making it a better option if you want smooth-running apps.

The X7 Pro packs in a 6,000mAh battery. That's one of the biggest power packs you'll find on a phone that's not designed for building sites or wilderness survival. Unsurprisingly, then, battery life is excellent, lasting well into a second day in our tests, which are more intensive than general phone use, so we'd expect to see it regularly reaching two days between charges.

It has a gorgeous AMOLED screen that measures 6.67in across the diagonal, which is generous without making it difficult to hold, and has a high resolution of 1220x2712 pixels. The panel is toughened Gorilla Glass, has a nifty refresh rate of 120Hz and is both bright and vibrant.

Where the phone starts to lose some points is with the cameras, where corners have been cut to keep the price down. Pictures are merely adequate in decent light and there aren't many features you can use to enhance your photography. If you want high-quality photos for treasured memories or printing, you should look elsewhere – the Pixel 7a, for example.

Its Android 15 operating system is packed with additional apps and games we had no interest in. It's possible to remove these manually to get the space back, but it's annoying that you have to do so.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Mediatek Dimensity 8400 Ultra processor • 8GB or 12GB RAM • 256GB or 512GB storage • 6.67in 1220x2712-pixel 120Hz AMOLED screen • 50-megapixel rear camera • 8-megapixel ultra-wide camera • 20-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 6.0 • Android 15 • 161x75x8.3mm (HxWxD) • 195g • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/53782

VERDICT A powerful yet relatively cheap phone, ideal for running demanding apps at decent speeds, but camera quality has been sacrificed

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE
Google Pixel 7a £299
Not as powerful, but has a better camera and less bloatware

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Colourful USB ports

What are they?

We're all familiar with USB ports that have black plastic tongues (for USB 2.0) or blue (for USB 3.0). But ports come in many other colours.

How do they work?

A USB port is a metal shell with a plastic tongue. This tongue accommodates the metal connectors that link the wiring inside your PC to the wires in the device you're plugging into it. Any device with a standard USB plug can connect to any USB port, but you only get the full benefit of a port's additional functions if the device is directly compatible. This is where USB's colour-coding can help.

What are the specs?

While black and blue tongues are the most common, some desktop PCs come with red (pictured below), yellow or orange ports. Typically, red and yellow ports are always on, which means they'll continue to charge an attached device even if the PC itself is powered off. You won't find these ports on laptops because they won't always be plugged into the mains, and therefore can't always transfer the required power supply. Yellow ports can be USB 2.0 or 3.0, while red ports are USB 3.1 or 3.2. Orange ports are for charging only, so can't be used to transfer data.

Can I change them later?

Yes, but you'll need to upgrade your motherboard. The USB ports on a desktop PC are attached to the motherboard and accessed through spaces left in the exterior casing.

USB DRIVE | **£85** from Amazon www.snipca.com/53762

PNY Pro Elite V3

At a push

Portable storage devices come in all shapes and sizes, but the smallest and most convenient are USB sticks. And while the external SSD is starting to dominate this market due to their high performance, the PNY PRO Elite V3 demonstrates that the humble flash drive isn't entirely dead and buried.

> "Robust and lightweight USB drive with a handy sliding mechanism, but lacks connector options"

It weighs just 20g and is only 57mm long, whether the connector is exposed or not. By default, the plug is hidden inside the metal enclosure for safe keeping, but slides out of the unit when you push in the opposite end. When you first try the drive the movement seems excessively stiff, but after some use the connector comes out more easily.

It uses the USB 3.2 Gen 2 standard, so will work with all standard USB ports, but not USB-C. To get the most out of it, therefore, you also need a port on your PC with USB 3.2 Gen 2 capability.

We tested the £85 1TB version. If you'd rather pay less for a smaller device, it's also available in 512GB (£60) and 256GB (£35) capacities.

PNY claims that the V3 has read speeds of up to 1000MB/s and write speeds of 800MB/s. Bear in mind, if you only have USB 3.0 port (USB 3.2 Gen 1), performance will be approximately half as good. In our tests, we achieved rates of 905MB/s (read) and a better-than-expected 888MB/s (write) speeds.

However, this isn't as fast as our current favourite portable storage device, the Netac US9 1TB (£75 from www.snipca.com/52113, reviewed in Issue 694), which transfers at around 10-per-cent faster despite being slightly cheaper. The US9 is a larger device, but offers both USB-A and USB-C connectors, (one at each end),

which makes it significantly more versatile.

SPECIFICATIONS

256GB, 512GB or 1TB capacities • USB 3.2 Gen 2 • 6x19x57mm (HxWxD) • 20g • Two-year warranty
www.snipca.com/53762

VERDICT An extremely portable and robust USB 3.2 Gen 2 storage device, but faster, cheaper and more flexible alternatives are available

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Netac US9 1TB
£75 A more versatile storage device with both USB-A and USB-C connectors. It also has slightly faster transfer speeds

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Is there a printer that scans and copies on both sides?

Q **I need an all-in-one printer that can automatically scan and copy multi-page documents and print on both sides. I'd also like to save the documents to my computer or a USB storage device.**
Rev Robert Shakesby

A While only some home printers can automatically print on both sides of a sheet, fewer still can automatically scan both sides of a document. However, we have reviewed one printer recently that was capable of both – the HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e (£185 from Amazon at www.snipca.com/53101, reviewed Issue 700, pictured). The main difference between this and a standard all-in-one printer is that it comes with a duplex automatic sheet feeder, so can make copies of double-sided documents.

It can also save these copies to your PC or to a storage device connected to its USB port.

It isn't the cheapest inkjet printer around, but it should serve your needs well. In our tests, its text-based prints were excellent, but it wasn't quite as good quality when printing photos.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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COOLING PAD | **£30** from Amazon www.snipca.com/53736

TopMate C12 Laptop Cooling Pad

Chill out

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

Laptops can often struggle to keep themselves cool, especially when you use them for resource-hungry creative tasks or gaming. If that sounds like yours, a cooling pad like the TopMate C12 is a handy solution. It has three 110mm fans and three 70mm fans that can operate at six different speeds, with the smaller fans capable of 2400rpm. These speeds are set via a panel near the bottom edge of the unit.

We put it to the test by first pushing our laptop's processor to its limits. Without the cooling pad, our laptop went from 20.2°C to 52.1°C. Using the C12 kept the temperature down to 44°C.

Even better, the device remained fairly quiet throughout. On its highest setting, we measured the noise of the fans at 58.5 decibels (dB) when holding the sound- level meter about 8cm away, and it dropped to 45dB when the pad sat on our laps. For reference, that's quieter than human speech.

You can adjust the angle of the device from 6.5 to 50 degrees, so you'll definitely find the position you prefer. Chunky flip-up rests keep the laptop firmly in position. However, while these were fine for a bulky gaming laptop, we did find they dug into our wrists when typing on a thinner laptop.

Our main criticism is that the pad is quite gaudy, with lights on the fans that illuminate the underside of your laptop and around its edge, though there are settings that let you tone everything down a bit.

SPECIFICATIONS

6x high-speed fans • Fits laptops with screens up to 17.3in • 2x USB 2.0 ports • Suitable for desk and lap use • 33x415x300mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/53736

VERDICT Does a great job keeping your laptop cooler while running more demanding software

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Tecknet Cooling Pad 12in-17in £20

Only three cooling fans, but a little cheaper if your laptop doesn't get excessively hot

MOUSE | **£69** from John Lewis www.snipca.com/53735

Logitech G309 Lightspeed

High profiles

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

The G309 Lightspeed sits firmly in the centre of Logitech's range of wireless mice and is aimed at the more casual gamer who doesn't need the elite features or performance of more premium products.

It connects to your PC via Bluetooth or Logitech's included USB dongle. You can switch between the two, so it's easy to use across two computers at the same time. It uses a standard (non-rechargeable) AA battery – one of which is included.

Logitech claims this will last between 300 and 600 hours, depending on which wireless technology you use. We couldn't test it for that long, but used it for a week across both dongle and Bluetooth. During that time, the battery drained by around five per cent, so Logitech's claims don't sound exaggerated.

The mouse has a fairly standard shape, so isn't making any claims to being ergonomic. But the overall shape is sleek, as the bulbous rear thins out towards the front. The buttons are snappy and light, while the scroll wheel moved smoothly under our finger when rotating, though clicking it required a little too much pressure for our liking. The mouse glides well and feels precise, but it worked better on a mat than our desktop.

Build quality is also impressive. The plastic shell feels reasonably thin but sturdy nonetheless, and the large lid for the battery compartment feels secure yet easy enough to open when needed.

Logitech's software is excellent and provides a wide range of settings to get the mouse working exactly as you want. This includes five profiles with alternative settings for different users or tasks.

SPECIFICATIONS

25,000dpi sensor • 300-600-hour battery life • 5 memory profiles • Wireless USB dongle supplied • Bluetooth • 39x64x120mm (HxWxD) • 86g (including battery) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/53735

VERDICT A good-value wireless mouse with plenty of customisation settings, but you'll have to replace the battery every now and then

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Logitech Lift Vertical Ergonomic Mouse £50

A cheaper alternative that's designed for comfort of use

DIGITAL RADIO | **£179** from Amazon www.snipca.com/53795

Roberts Rambler Classic

Can't get past the price

Roberts radios often blend a retro aesthetic with modern functionality, and the Rambler Classic doesn't stray from that blueprint. At its core is a DAB+ technology that lets you listen to the full range of UK digital radio stations. It also has a Bluetooth receiver, so if you can't find anything to listen to over the airwaves, you can stream music, podcasts or other audio to it from your smartphone.

> "A classy retro design with decent features, but it's pricey"

The design wouldn't look out of place in the 1970s, with a leather and bamboo exterior, a leather carrying handle and several buttons and dials across the top (pictured below). The buttons are used to configure preset stations and access them, while the dials let you change the volume and scroll through the options on a screen, which also sits on the top of the case.

Audio quality is excellent. If you mainly intend to listen to radio shows or podcasts, you'll be pleased with the clear vocal reproduction and separation. And when it comes to music, it manages an impressively warm bass, clean mid-range audio and delicate, controlled high frequencies, as well as surprisingly loud volume levels for a radio of this size (a child's shoebox).

If there's one thing lacking straight out of the box, it's a battery pack. You can buy one when you order for £40, but we were slightly bemused that a product that goes by the name of Rambler wouldn't come with a battery. But there are plenty of features at your fingertips. You can switch between DAB+, DAB and FM radio, select up to 40 station presets, set up an alarm and even tailor a sound that suits you best with the built-in EQ options.

Overall, however, while it looks classy and well designed, it's a little too expensive for what you get. Rivals like the Pure Woodland (£140 from www.snipca.com/49294, reviewed in Issue 678) may not bring the retro chic but it offers similar functions for less and sounds just as good. The Woodland also comes with a built-in rechargeable battery, making it a genuinely portable device.

SPECIFICATIONS

DAB+ radio • Bluetooth 4.2 • 3.5mm headphone jack • 235x269x96mm (HxWxD) • 1kg • Two-year warranty

www.snipca.com/53795

VERDICT An attractive digital radio and Bluetooth speaker with a classy retro feel, but it's expensive – particularly if you want the optional battery

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Pure Woodland £140 Cheaper, with a more modern design, similar features, and includes a rechargeable battery for instant portability

DO I REALLY NEED...

A golden graphics card?

What is it?

Asus's ROG Astral GeForce RTX 5090 Dhahab Edition (pictured) is an exclusive golden version of the company's top-of-the-range graphics card. It's shiny, but it's not actually made of real gold (www.snipca.com/53806).

What does it do?

Graphics cards do the complicated maths that resource-intensive software needs to perform, taking the load off a PC's central processor. Nvidia's new GeForce RTX 5090 graphics hardware, which is built into this card, is the fastest we've seen.

What's the catch?

It'll be expensive. Asus hasn't revealed prices, but with the non-gold version costing £2,670, don't expect a bargain. Also, it's only available in the Middle East, so if you really want one you're going to have to import it.

So can I do without it?

Yes. Most people will find all the power they need from cheaper graphics cards that are a little less like bling.

NEXT ISSUE

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Geekom A6
An affordable mini PC that's surprisingly capable

Oppo Pad 3
A 12in Android tablet that costs a lot less than its rivals

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£799 from www.snipca.com/51831
Tested Issue 683

This laptop has the same processor (Intel Core Ultra 7 155H) as our previous favourite (Acer Swift Go 4), but manages to squeeze more speed out of it. It also comes with 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Excellent value overall.

ALTERNATIVE Acer Swift Go 14 Still a fast and powerful laptop, with a great 14in screen. £749 from www.snipca.com/49733

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £656 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.9in
£329 from www.snipca.com/53807
Tested Issue 646

The price of the 10th-generation iPad, released in 2022, has fallen far enough that it's the best-value model. The link above takes you to Apple, but also check John Lewis where it's been as low as £309.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

Honor MagicPad2
£500 from www.snipca.com/53150
Tested Issue 700

With a larger screen (12.3in) than the Galaxy Tab S9 (below) and a similar performance for less money, Honor's MagicPad2 is a superb new tablet. The OLED screen has a strikingly sharp resolution, and yet battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £799 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53387
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now discounted to £599 (128GB), this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £599 from www.snipca.com/52411

ANDROID PHONE

PRICE DROP

Google Pixel 7a
£299 from www.snipca.com/53388
Tested Issue 660

A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Nothing Phone 2a Don't be put off by the odd name. This has a distinctive design, superb camera and decent battery life. From a UK company too. £299 from www.snipca.com/49930

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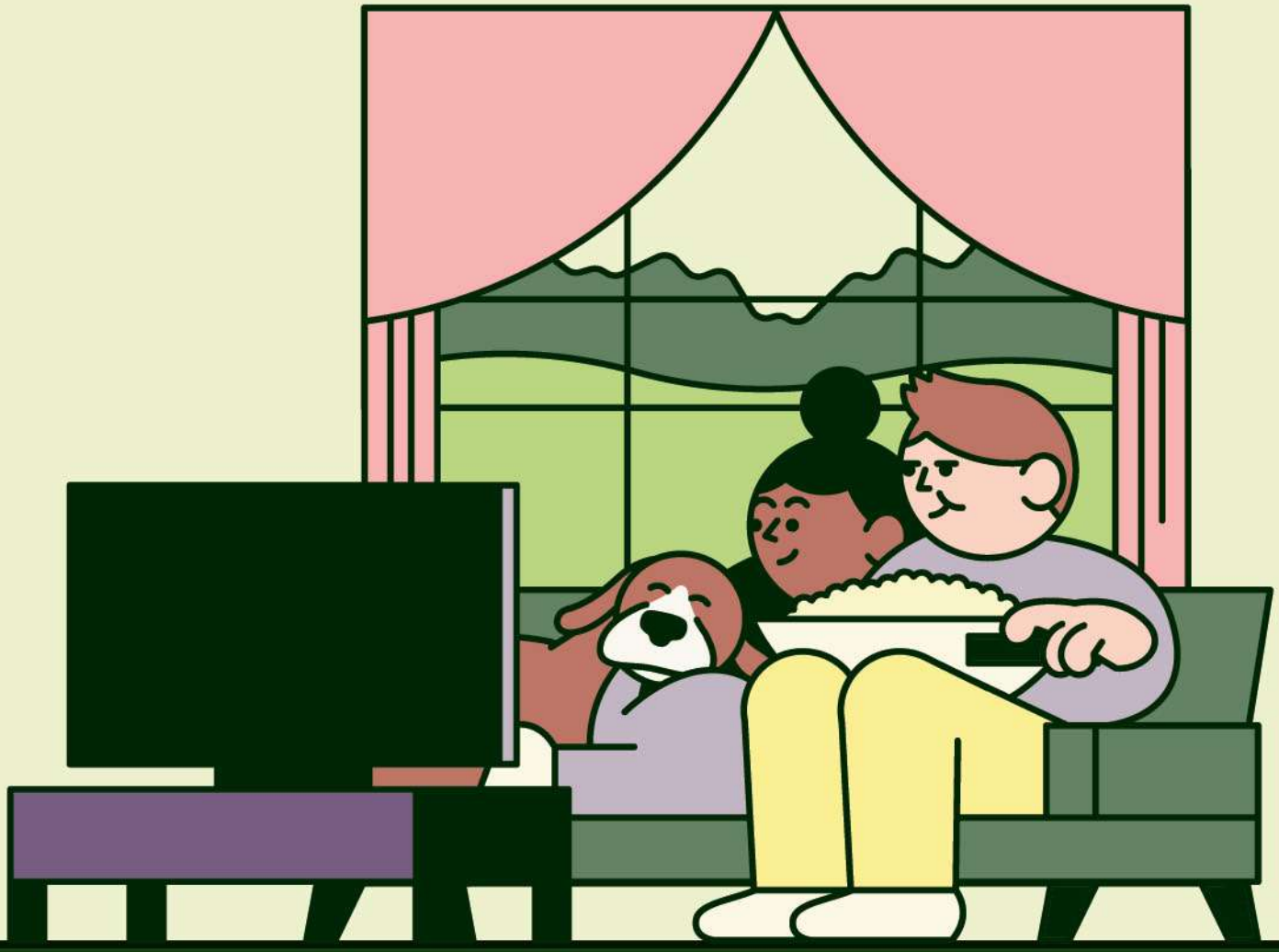

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

Geekom A8
£899 from www.snipca.com/51157
Tested Issue 689

This tiny machine (37x112x112mm) doesn't have much room for ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD, a fast processor and an SD card slot for adding storage. It comes with 32GB RAM, as does a slightly slower model that's typically around £170 cheaper and has only a 1TB SSD. Take your pick.

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro Has an older processor, but comes with plenty of ports and room to add a graphics card. £560 from www.snipca.com/52858

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629

Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £19.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£59 from www.snipca.com/50751
Tested Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £38 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£180 from www.snipca.com/51687
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£92 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £92; 2TB costs £152.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £47 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 4...

Netac ZX20L 2TB portable SSDs

Netac

Winner of a Recommended award in Issue 701, the Netac ZX20L is a fast and powerful portable SSD that uses the 3.2 Gen 2x2 standard. This means it can transfer data up to a maximum speed of 20Gbps, which is four times faster than USB 3.0 and twice that of USB 3.2 Gen 2.

It has a read speed of up to 2000MB/s, accelerating video editing and image rendering. Also, large games load in seconds. Its USB-C cable means it easily connects to a wide selection of smartphones, computers, tablets and TVs.

Measuring about one-third the size of a smartphone and weighing just 50 grams, it easily fits into bags and pockets. It has an aluminium body, making it lightweight and easy to grip, while the engraved design aids heat dissipation by increasing the surface area, helping to keep it cool.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/53559 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 11 March. Good luck!

You can buy the **Netac ZX20L** in four capacities: 256GB (£42.99), 512GB (£56.99), 1TB (£85.99) and 2TB (£139.99). They're all available from www.snipca.com/53308. For more information on Netac products, including memory cards and USB sticks, visit www.netac.com.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830

£250 from www.snipca.com/51715
Tested Issue 676

This has recently risen in price from £180, but it's still better value than the ET-1810 because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for £110 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos, which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £170 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB

£199 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung CU8000
More expensive, but has a 55in LED screen and sharp 4K resolution. Connectivity is good, with three HDMI and two USB ports. £419 from www.snipca.com/52110

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800

£225 from www.snipca.com/52957
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £210 from www.snipca.com/52051

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35 Use Clipchamp's tools to improve your videos
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40 Readers' Tips
42 Browser Tips: Search your browsing history using AI

PLUS
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
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HOW TO...

Use Clipchamp's new tools to improve your videos

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Clipchamp **Time required:** 60 minutes

We're big fans of Clipchamp, Microsoft's video-editing app that's now built into Windows 11, and is available to install for Windows 10. If you've not tried it yet, you may be surprised at how accomplished even the free edition can be.

It comes with a range of templates to help you get started, and a wide selection of editing tools, with which you can trim, mix, add transitions, and overlay your video with subtitles and shapes.

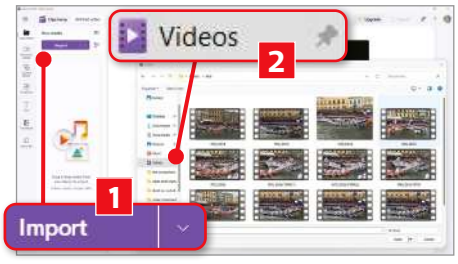
The paid-for version costs £9.99 a month (discounted to £6.99 for your first month), or £99.99 a year (discounted to £69.99 for your first year) if you commit to 12 months up front. For that, you get 4K video exports, premium filters to give your videos a professional look, and automatic backups to online storage so you can access your videos wherever you are.

Microsoft updates Clipchamp regularly, so there are always new tools to try. Here we'll explain how to enhance a video using the best new features released in January (www.snipca.com/53724). If you don't currently have Clipchamp installed on your computer, download the latest version from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/53722).

To check you're using the latest version of Clipchamp, open the Microsoft Store, then click Downloads at the bottom left. If Clipchamp requires an update, you'll see it listed at the top.

1 Import your raw footage

As with any video-editing software you first need to import your raw footage. Open Clipchamp then click 'Create a new video' on the home screen. On the following screen, click Import (1 in our screenshot), then navigate to the folder containing your video files and select them 2.



Click 'Import' then select which files you want in your video

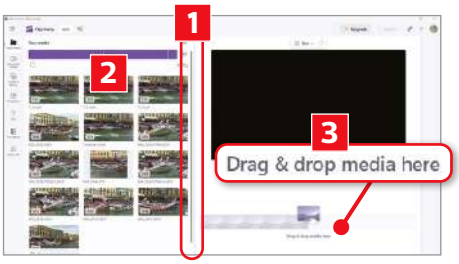
Don't worry if your clips are longer than you need. Although you could trim them down on your phone (assuming that's how you shot them), you'll find it a lot more convenient to do so in Clipchamp itself where you have the benefits of a keyboard, mouse and larger computer screen.

Now click 'Untitled video' above the playback window and type a name for your project. We're calling ours 'sete' because our footage was shot in Sète, on the south coast of France, during one of its festival days. The video shows teams of local oarsmen rowing towards each other with a jouster on the end of each boat. The jousters try to knock their opponent off the rival boat and into the water using a long pole.

Once you've named your video, find it the next time you start Clipchamp by scrolling down to the bottom of the home screen and clicking its thumbnail.

2 Assemble a rough cut

We have a problem with our footage: because it was all shot from a single seat in the stands, all the thumbnails look similar. This makes it tricky to know in which order we should add them to the timeline.



We've made the left sidebar larger to make our video thumbnails bigger

How I use Clipchamp

Clipchamp is easy to use, which makes it the perfect tool for quickly knocking together some rough footage into a short video for family and friends. I use it to assemble clips I've shot on my phone so I don't need to keep scrolling through my library, finding what I want to share, and tapping each one in turn. The result is far more entertaining (and less annoying) for those I want to share them with.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you use Clipchamp?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Naturally, some videos work best in a strictly chronological order, in which case the order in which they were imported is also the order in which you'll add them to the timeline. But we want to build up some tension here, so we're going to arrange our clips to highlight exciting moments.

To better tell our items apart, we clicked and held on the vertical divider between the 'Your media' sidebar and the working area, and dragged it towards the centre of the screen (1 in our screenshot above). Doing so has made our thumbnails bigger 2, helping us make better use of the available space and making it far easier to tell them apart. We'll now start dragging them on to the timeline where it says 'Drag & drop media here' 3.

As you start to build up a sequence of clips, you may come across one that should already be on the timeline between two others that you've already placed. Don't unpick what you've already done to make space for it. Instead, just drag it to the join between the two clips that should sit either side of it, and release it. Its neighbours will shuffle aside to make space.

Likewise, if you have two similar clips and realise you've added the wrong one, save yourself the bother of removing the first and inserting its replacement by simply dragging the correct clip from the 'Your media' sidebar and dropping it on top of the incorrect one. Clipchamp will offer to replace the old one with the new when you release the mouse button (see screenshot below left).

Things might feel like they're a bit jumbled to start with, but that's normal: you're just roughly assembling your clips at this point in more or less the order you want. You can drag them into a more appropriate order later, and even cut some of the clips into multiple smaller chunks and rearrange these smaller parts however you like.

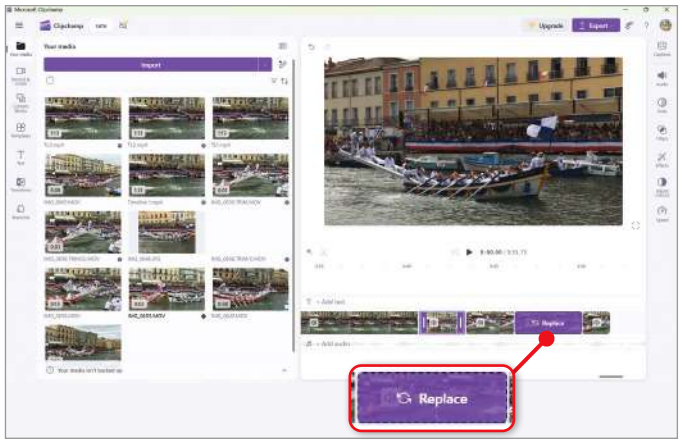
The simplest edit you can make is to isolate a single moment of action in a clip. To do this, click the clip on the timeline, then drag the purple handles that appear at its beginning and end so they sit either side of the action.

If you want to split a clip so you can drag chunks of it around on the timeline, click in the empty space either above or below the timeline to position the vertical marker that shows which frame is visible in the playback window. Now drag the marker until you find the point where you want to make a cut. Press S to split the clip at that point. You can then repeat the trick of dragging the handles at either end of your new clips to refine the edit.

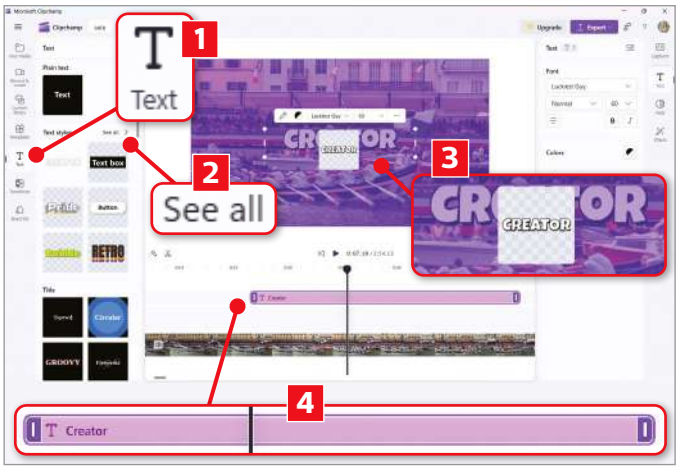
3 Use new text styles to add captions

One of the new features in Clipchamp is a batch of text styles, giving you different ways to present captions. Rewind to almost the start of your video by dragging the horizontal scrollbar beneath the timeline, then click in the blank space above or below the timeline itself to position the playhead at the point in the video where you want your text to appear.

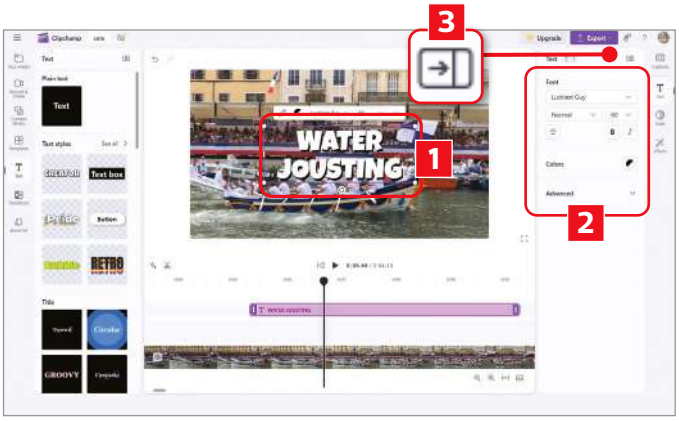
Now click Text on the left (1 in our screenshot below) and click 'See all' to the right of 'Text styles' 2. Now choose a style you like and drag it on to the playback frame on the right. We've chosen the Creator style 3. When you release it, you'll see that a new purple block appears in the timeline bearing the example text that appears on the screen for that style, which in this case is 'Creator' 4.



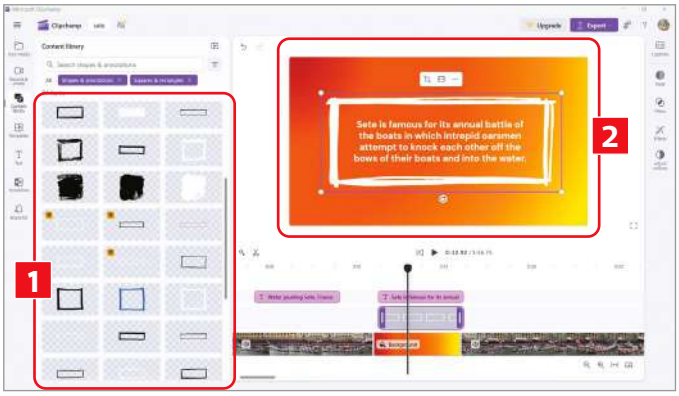
Simply drag new video clips onto the timeline to replace ones you don't want



Drag the text style you want to use on to the video preview



As well as editing the text, you can change the font style, size and colour



Drag a shape on to the background you created

Double-click the text in the playback window, then change it to whatever you want directly on the playback frame – we chose 'Water jousting' (1 in our screenshot above). You can also change the font, size and colour 2 in the sidebar. When you've finished editing your text, click the small icon at the top right to hide the sidebar 3.

4 Create a coloured background for your text

Sometimes, text works best on a background. This is particularly true when you need to include a lot of words, which may be difficult to read when placed on top of moving video. In such instances, you'd do better to lay it on top of a coloured background. The impressive new colour picker tool lets you pick up to six colours to build a complex gradient.

As our video was shot in the south of France, we want to use warm colours: red, orange and yellow. Click 'Content library' on the left (1 in our screenshot below), then scroll down to and click Backgrounds. Drag the Gradient thumbnail 2 from the sidebar to where on the timeline you want it to appear in your video. We've dropped it between two scenes 3.

Now click the Colour icon at the top right, then the circular button next to 'Colour' that appears. A Gradient tab will drop down 4. This has 16 gradients you can select with a single click. The coloured circles at the bottom of the tab show which colours currently appear in your gradient. If you want to change any, click the circle containing the relevant colour, then click a replacement colour in the box that appears.

To add a new colour, click the '+' sign at the end of the row of colours and, to remove an existing colour, click it, then click the rubbish bin in the box that opens.

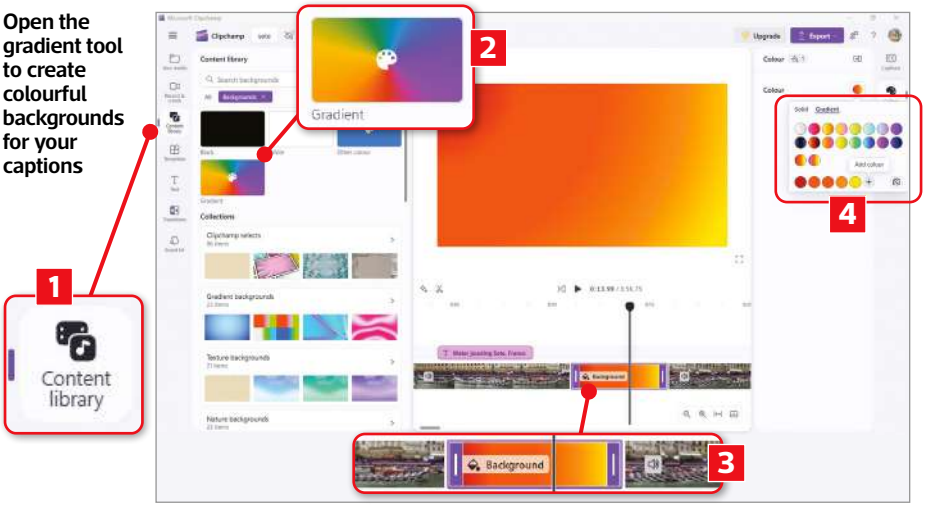
5 Add shapes

Elsewhere in the Content library, you'll find an expanded selection of shapes, which you can place on top of videos, gradients and more. When used carefully, these can help draw attention to interesting features, or simply balance out a lopsided caption screen. To find the new batch of shapes, click the 'x' next to Background on the left to return to the full range of 'Content library' options, then scroll down and click the › (right-pointing arrow) next to 'Shapes & annotations'.

Browse the various sections and click through to the one that's most likely to contain the kind of shape that you want to use. As you can see from our screenshot above, we've clicked through to the 'Squares & rectangles' section 1, from which we've dragged a hand-drawn rectangle on to the gradient background 2.

As the rectangle is smaller than a full video frame, we dropped it at the very centre of the playback window, then resized it using the circular handles that appear at its corners.

Open the gradient tool to create colourful backgrounds for your captions



6 Finish, save and share your video

Carry on trimming your clips, importing more if you want to, and adding backgrounds, gradients and shapes. If you need to remove anything from your video, click it on the timeline, then press Delete or Backspace on your keyboard. If this leaves an empty gap in the video you'll see a hatched grey area on the timeline with a dustbin icon at its centre. Click that icon and the gap will be removed, with the content to its left and right closing up to flow on one from the other.

When you've finished your edit, it's time to save and share it. Click the purple Export button at the top of the screen, then select a resolution. The highest quality you can choose if you've not paid to upgrade is 1080p, which is Full HD.

After you've chosen a resolution, Clipchamp will compile the video, with a progress bar at the top of the screen showing how much longer it has to go. When it's finished, click 'Save to your computer' or one of the online options below, which include OneDrive, Dropbox and YouTube.

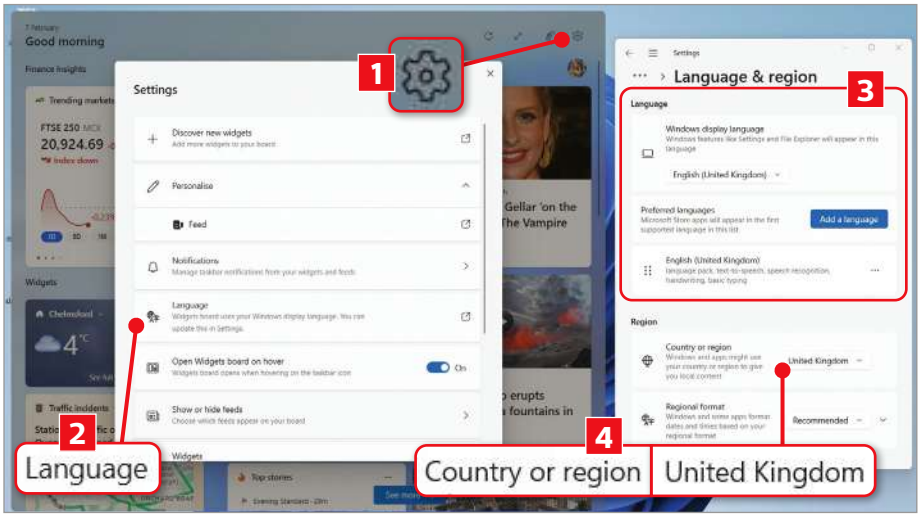
Create the perfect widget setup

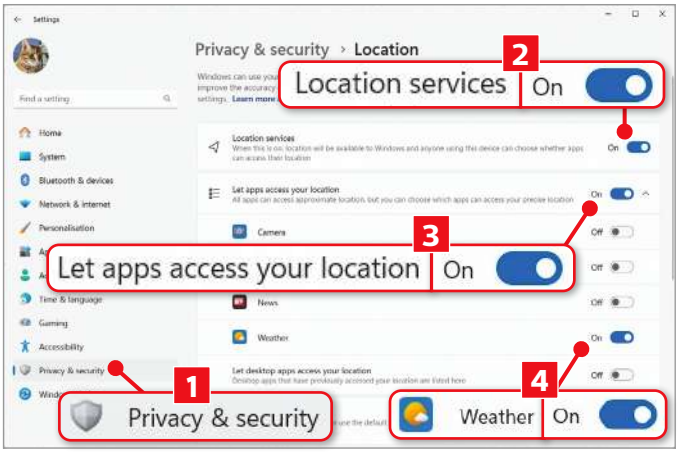
What you need: Windows 11
Time required: 30 minutes

One thing we weren't expecting in Windows 11 was for widgets to become so useful, rather than annoying desktop clutter as in Windows 10 and earlier. They'll be even better once Microsoft brings back the Outlook and Calendar widgets it removed recently. There are several ways to locate widgets – click the icon at the far left of your taskbar, swipe in from the edge of your screen, or press Windows key+W. If the taskbar widget button isn't visible, enable it by opening Settings (press Windows key+I) then clicking Personalisation followed by Taskbar. Here, switch on the slider next to Widgets.

STEP 1

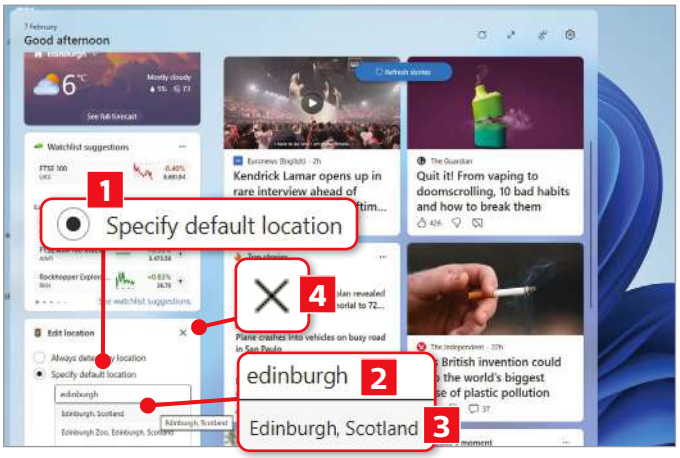
Many widgets, such as news and weather, will need to know your location and language to work effectively. Windows can usually detect your location on the basis of your IP address, but it's still worth making sure your language and location are correct. Open your widgets window (see above), then click the cog icon top right 1, followed by Language 2 to go straight to the relevant Windows Settings. Here, make sure 'English (United Kingdom)' is set in both parts of the Language section 3, and that United Kingdom is selected in the 'Country or region' dropdown menu 4.





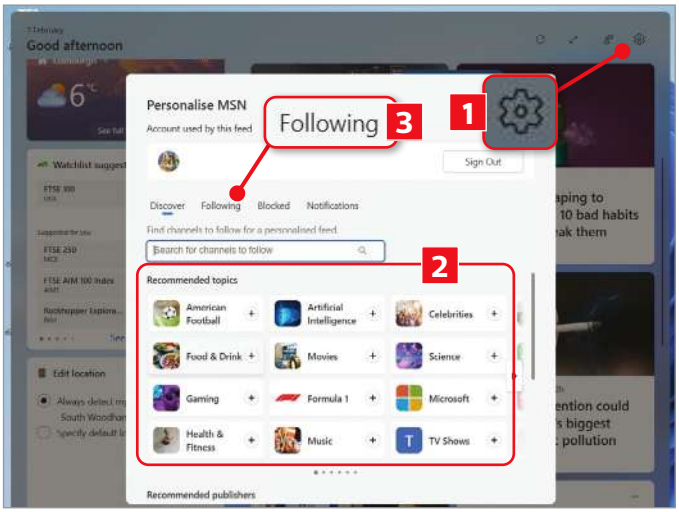
STEP 2

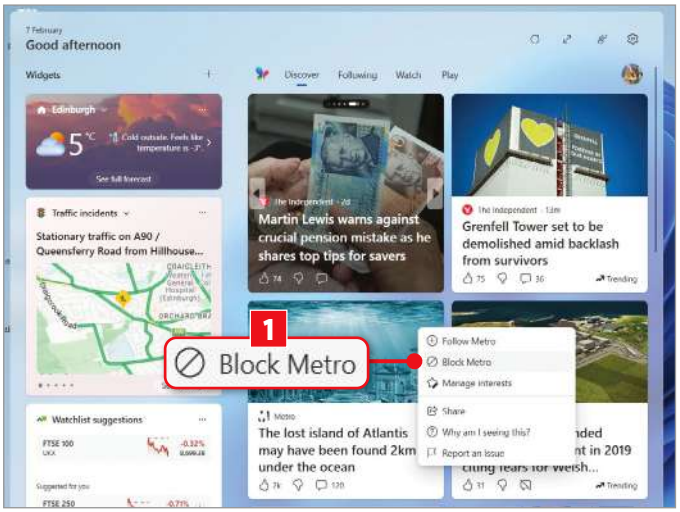
To ensure accurate weather forecasts, check that the weather widget can use your location. Click 'Privacy & security' 1 in the Settings sidebar, then turn on the sliders next to 'Location services' 2, 'Let apps access your location' 3 and Weather 4. Next, click 'Set default', type your postcode into the box that appears and – when Windows drops a pin in the map at your location – click Save. The location you've just set will be used if Windows is ever unable to detect your location automatically.



STEP 3

The travel widget also displays content based on your PC's location. However, you can change this on the widget dashboard. Hover over the travel widget and click the three dots that appear in the top-right corner. Then, click to select 'Specify default location' 1 and start typing your location into the box that appears 2. Select the relevant place in the list that appears 3, then click the 'x' 4 to return to the default traffic view.

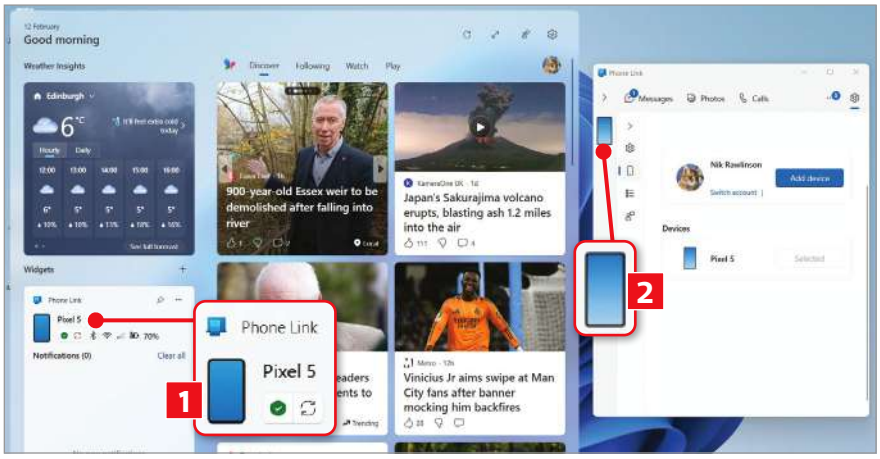


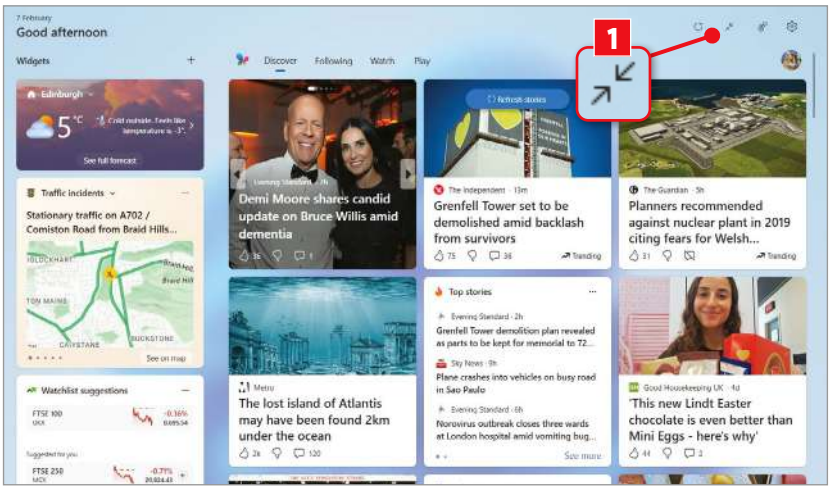


STEP 4 To customise your news widget so it only shows stories of interest to you, click the cog icon top right **1**, then expand the Personalise section and click Feed. Now, click the '+' icon beside each subject area you want to include in your news feed **2**. If you later change your mind, click the Following tab **3**, then click the Following button to the right of any subject area to remove it from your feed.

STEP 5 To further customise your news feed, specify which news outlets you want to follow. Scroll down the news feed window (see Step 4) and you'll find a selection of sources. Click the '+' icon next to those you want to include in your feed. To block a news source, wait until you see its content in the relevant widget, then click the three dots in the top-right corner of the card and select Block [name of source] **1** on the menu that appears.

STEP 6 Phone Link is an integral part of Windows that lets you send texts and read phone notifications on your PC. Adding the Phone Link widget **1** lets you do this without having to switch to the Phone Link app every time. You'll still need to set up your phone in the Phone Link program on Windows and install 'Link to Windows' on your phone (see www.snipca.com/53800 for instructions). Once you've done this, check that your phone is set up by opening the Phone Link app and clicking the device icon in the sidebar **2**.




Good afternoon
Widgets
Discover
Following
Watch
Play
1
Demi Moore shares candid update on Bruce Willis amid dementia
Grenfell Tower set to be demolished amid backlash from survivors
Planners recommended against nuclear plant in 2019 citing fears for Welsh...
Traffic incidents
Stationary traffic on A702 / Comiston Road from Braid Hills...
Top stories
Grenfell Tower demolition plan revealed as parts to be kept for memorial to 72...
Plane crashes into vehicles on busy road in Sao Paulo
Norovirus outbreak closes three wards at London hospital amid vomiting bug...
Watchlist suggestions
The lost island of Atlantis may have been found 2km under the ocean
'This new Lindt Easter chocolate is even better than Mini Eggs - here's why'

STEP 7 When you've finished setting up your widgets, you may find you're spending a lot of time scrolling. If so, maximise the widgets panel to fill your screen by clicking the double-headed arrow icon at the top right of the panel. Windows remembers this setting and will open the panel full screen every time. To close it, press Esc. To return it so it opens in the smaller window, click the two-arrow icon **1** to shrink it again.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Set a timer for scheduled screenshots

I'm a recent convert to ShareX (www.snipca.com/53506), after you recommended it in Issue 702 (page 18). I love how easy it is to take scheduled screenshots every few minutes to check the performance of my PC when I'm in the middle of a task that uses lots of resources, such as editing videos.

To take screenshots at intervals, open ShareX then click Capture at the top left, followed by 'Auto capture'. Now change the settings to suit your needs. The most important one is the 'Repeat time' (1 in our screenshot), which is the interval between your screenshots.

I've been using it to see how the graphs in Resource Monitor 2 change over, say, 10 minutes. This helps to identify moments when my PC is sluggish. To open Resource Monitor (which shows more detailed performance information than Task Manager) press Windows key+R then type resmon. I'm sure other readers will find other reasons for taking staggered screenshots.

Ken Newman

Ken wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD

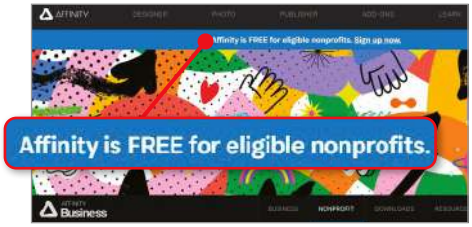
Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433

SOFTWARE

Use Serif's free software for charity work

In Issue 701 (page 20) you advised Keith Brushett to look at Serif's Affinity creative software suite as an alternative to Adobe that his local charity could use. You quote Serif's very reasonable retail price of £159.99.

However, I'm sure your readers will want to know that after Canva bought Serif in March 2024 they've made the three Affinity programs (Designer, Photo and Publisher) available for free to registered charities. For details visit www.snipca.com/53619 (see screenshot below left)



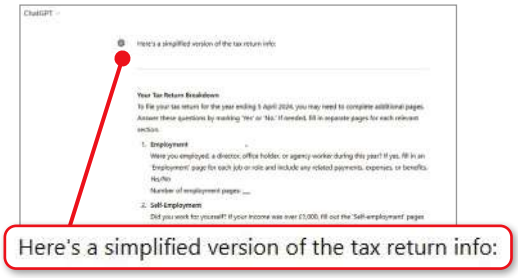
Doug Chaplin

AI

Use ChatGPT for tax jargon and translations

I enjoyed Issue 702's Cover Feature on ChatGPT (https://chatgpt.com). As an independent author, I've found it very useful as a tool for editing manuscripts. It provides instant feedback, corrections and suggestions for improvement.

But I didn't realise just how useful it could be until I had to decipher a complicated document from my tax adviser. It was filled with jargon that made no sense to me. I followed your advice and uploaded the document, then asked ChatGPT to interpret it. Within moments, it broke everything down into clear, jargon-free English, helping me understand everything (see screenshot above). I also used to rely on Google Translate for English-to-Chinese translations, but I've found that ChatGPT works just as well.



John Tsang

WI-FI

Combine refurbished router with SIM-only phone deal

Issue 701's Cover Feature on binning old routers was interesting.

Why I stopped using...

FotoSketcher

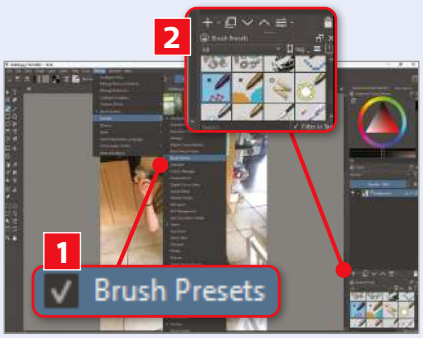
It's true that FotoSketcher (www.snipca.com/53248) is great at turning your photos into artworks (see Issue 700, page 18), but I quickly outgrew its rather basic tools.

And what I use instead...

I started using **Krita** (free from https://krita.org) after a friend recommended it. They told me it had a wide variety of brushes for transforming your photos – and it's true. Find them all by clicking Settings at the top, then Dockers followed by Brush Presets (1 in our screenshot). They appear at the bottom right 2.

Krita also makes it easy to edit photos using layers, so you can see what a change would look like before making it permanent. I'm also a fan of the option to change what appears on the editing toolbar. You can see this by clicking Settings, then choosing Configure Toolbars.

Stephen Davey



Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

I think some of your readers may benefit from my own experience. Back in 2023, I bought a refurbished Oppo T1a wireless 5G router with Wi-Fi 6 and a SIM slot (pictured above) on eBay. I also signed up to a SIM-only deal with iD Mobile at £14 a month, with 250GB data and unlimited calls and texts (www.snipca.com/53659).

I'm now getting speeds in excess of 240Mbps on 5G and 40Mbps on 4G. For the whole of last year this equates to around £28 a month, including the cost of the router. With a year's experience and data rollover, I've now reduced my contract to £10 a month with 110GB data. Buying my own 5G mobile router has been a sound investment.

I'm so impressed with iD Mobile that I now also have a TP-Link M7350 mobile hotspot with a SIM for my car, and a SIM-only contract for my iPhone 11. Total cost for all three SIMs is £23 a month.

Dave McHamilton

Reader recommends...

Honor MagicPad2 tablet

£500 from www.snipca.com/53150

I was intrigued by the MagicPad2 when I read your review in Issue 700 (page 25) and did a double-take when I clicked the link in and saw a price of £400, not £500 as you quoted. I was immediately suspicious, but I checked and it seemed like a genuine discount – though I notice the price has now gone back up.

I was immediately impressed with the screen – it's so bright, and puts my Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 in the shade. It's slim and light also, and has a super-fast refresh rate of 144Hz. There's no buffering when I watch movies, and photos look amazing.

I bought a SanDisk Ultra Dual USB drive for extra storage and a 66-Watt charger, which fills the battery in just over an hour. I also bought a Bluetooth mouse and numeric keyboard to work with it.

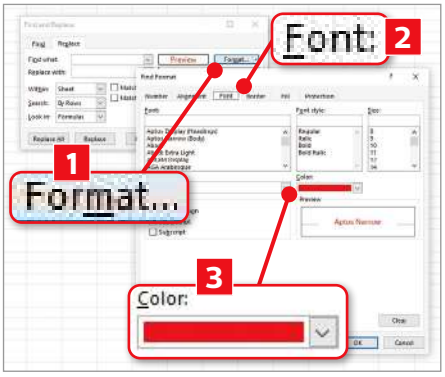
Derek Hunt

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

OFFICE

Use white font to hide confidential spreadsheet data

Regarding your tip in Issue 702 (page 47) on hiding cells when printing spreadsheets, I use a different (and possibly easier) way. I maintain a club spreadsheet with members' details, including names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. I enter data into cells using black font, but use red for data that members deem confidential. If someone needs a printout of all members' details I 'replace' red font with white (this assumes all cell fill colour is white).



To do this, click the Home tab at the top then 'Find and Select' in the Editing section. Now click Format (1 in our screenshot below left) to the right of 'Find what:' and select the Font tab 2. Click the Color dropdown menu and choose red 3 then click OK. Next, click Format to the right of 'Replace with:' and choose white.

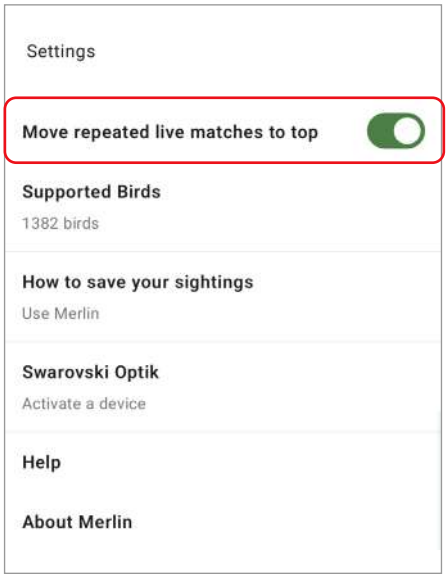
This replaces all data in red with white on white. There are two things to consider: if you now save the spreadsheet you would have to reverse the process next time you open it, so exit without saving. Also, this is only for printing. If you email the spreadsheet to someone they will still see confidential data just by hovering over a cell. For those with knowledge they could create a macro to automate the process.

Richard Bale

APP

Move bird species to the top of Merlin's list

Does *Computeractive* have any secret twitchers among its staff? In Issue 701 (page 28) I was interested in the Birdfy Feeder 2 Duo video bird feeder (£370 from www.snipca.com/53289), and might treat myself to one. But before doing so I'm going to update the Merlin Bird ID app you recommended in Issue 700, page 44 (Android www.snipca.com/53097; iOS www.snipca.com/53098).



One option in the app that other readers might like is 'Move repeated live matches to top' (see screenshot above). Turn it on and when you use the Sound ID feature to recognise a bird's call, the app will place species you've previously identified at the top of the list. This means the birds that are most commonly seen in your area will be prominent in your list, cutting the time spent scrolling through less relevant species. You'll find the option by clicking the bottom-left Settings cog.

Ian Collings

Browser Tips

CHROME

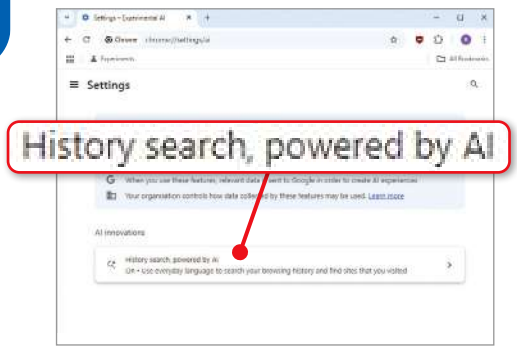
Search your browsing history using AI

It's now over a year since Google introduced AI features in Chrome (www.snipca.com/53677), but most are still only available to users in the US. One exception is the browser's integration of Google Lens, which uses AI to search for content you select on web pages (see Issue 691, page 42).

Chrome 133, released in early February, finally adds another AI option, along with a new Experimental AI section in the browser's Settings. It's called 'History search, powered by AI' (see screenshot below) and lets you search for sites in your browsing history using "everyday language". Rather than just find matching keywords in page titles and URLs, the AI feature searches the actual content of sites to provide more accurate results.

For example, you can ask 'What was that Italian restaurant I looked at last week?' or – to keep it brief – 'Italian restaurant last week'. Chrome will then search your browsing history and suggest relevant pages, so you click straight through to the best answer.

The AI-search feature is entirely optional and disabled by default, if you'd prefer not to have Google nosing through your history. Additionally, it will never suggest pages you've viewed in Chrome's Incognito mode. See our Workshop below to find out how to use 'History search, powered by AI'. The feature is still in early development so "won't always get it right".



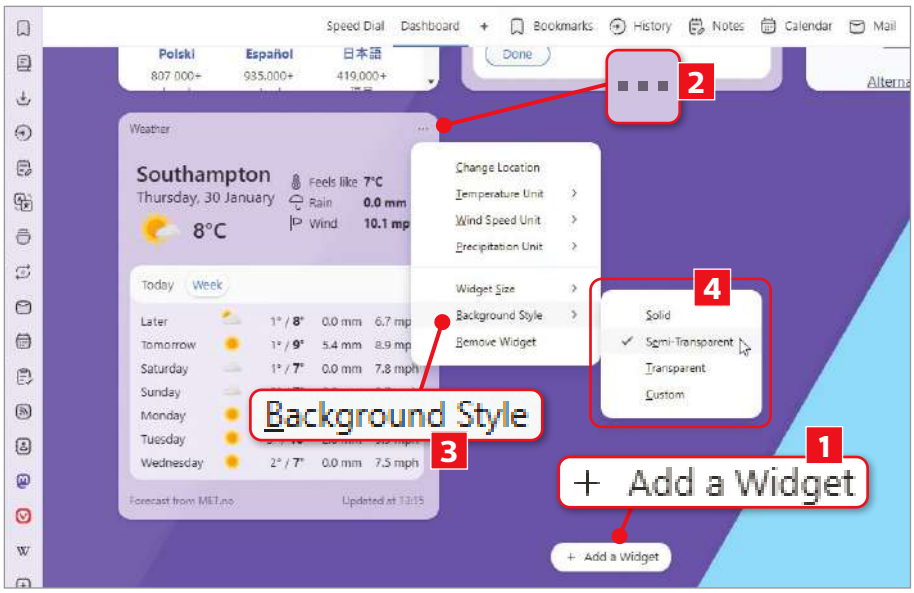
VIVALDI

Customise the widgets on your Dashboard

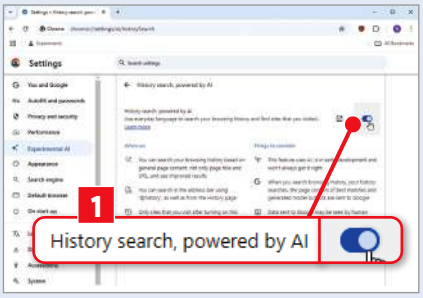
Vivaldi 7.1, released at the end of January, adds more customisation options to the browser's Dashboard feature. This personalised start page was introduced last October to provide an 'all-in-one control centre' for your favourite browser features and websites (see Issue 697, page 42).

You can now add a Weather widget to your Dashboard to see a daily and weekly forecast for your area. Click the 'Add a Widget' button at the bottom of your Dashboard (1 in our screenshot below), and select Weather to add it to the page. Search for and set your location, then choose whether to show the temperature in Celsius or Fahrenheit, the wind speed in miles or kilometres per hour, and precipitation in millimetres or inches.

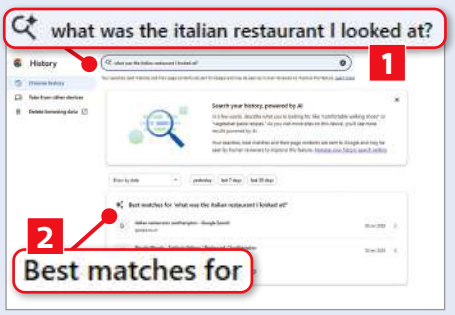
Vivaldi now lets you change the background style of individual widgets, to make some stand out more than others. Click the three-dot icon 2 in a widget's top-right corner and open the Background Style menu 3. Choose between a solid, transparent or semi-transparent



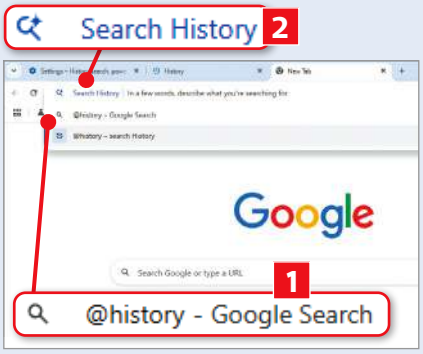
WORKSHOP How to use Chrome's AI-powered history search



1 To activate the new feature, click Chrome's three-line menu and choose Settings then Experimental AI. Switch on the option 'History search, powered by AI' 1. Only sites you visit after turning on the option will appear in your AI-powered results.



2 Access your History by going to chrome://history, or by pressing Ctrl+H, then type your query into the search box at the top of the page 1. The most relevant results detected by the AI tool will be listed under 'Best matches for [search query]' 2.



3 Alternatively, type @history in Chrome's address bar 1, and press Space, to search your browsing history from there 2. Be aware that your searches, best matches and their page contents are sent to Google and "may be seen by human reviewers".

BEST EXTENSION FOR... Shortening long web addresses

Url Shortener

Chromium
www.snipca.com/53683
Firefox
www.snipca.com/53684

Lengthy web addresses look messy and are tedious to type. We use our own tool Snipca to shorten URLs, but you can shrink links yourself using Url Shortener. Click its toolbar button and it will automatically detect and shorten the address of the current page – or you can paste a link from elsewhere. Click 'Shorten URL and Copy to Clipboard' (see screenshot) to save the result.

The extension also generates a QR code for links, which can be scanned with your phone's camera. Right-click the code to save it to your PC. Url Shortener uses TinyURL by default, but also supports Bitly, Is.gd and other URL-shortening services if you enter their API keys. Go into its Settings and click 'How to get API key' for instructions for each service.

If you don't like that, try...

Goose.re Shortlinks

Chromium
www.snipca.com/53686

This extension lets you track how many times your shortened links have been visited, but also requires you to sign up for an account.

background, or select Custom to apply a specific colour 4.

BRAVE

Improve the quality of your search results

Brave has added a useful new feature to its built-in search engine, Brave Search, to help improve the quality of your search results. It's called Rerank and lets you customise Brave Search so that sites you like and trust are prioritised in your results, while those you don't are ignored.

This is very different to Google, which makes those decisions for you, based on personal data it's collected – placing you in what's commonly referred to as a 'filter bubble'. Brave says Rerank provides "more transparent personalisation" to give you greater control over which sites you see.

To try the new feature, type a search query into Brave's address bar, New Tab search box or the Brave Search website (https://search.brave.com – you can also access this in other browsers). On the results page, click the new Rerank button in the top-right corner – this looks like up-and-down arrows (1 in our screenshot below). Click 'Got it' to close the welcome message and you'll see a list of all the site domains included in your results.

Hover your cursor over an entry and click the 'Raise [domain]' (thumbs-up) icon 2 to make it rank higher in future search results, or the 'Discard [domain]' (thumbs-down) icon 3 to exclude it from Brave Search. You can review which sites you've raised or discarded by clicking the Edit button 4, and remove them from either list – or choose 'Clear all'.

The choices you make through Rerank only apply to you, not other Brave Search users. Although the feature requires saving data to a cookie, Brave says this won't be used to track your search queries.

FIREFOX

Reduce memory usage by unloading tabs

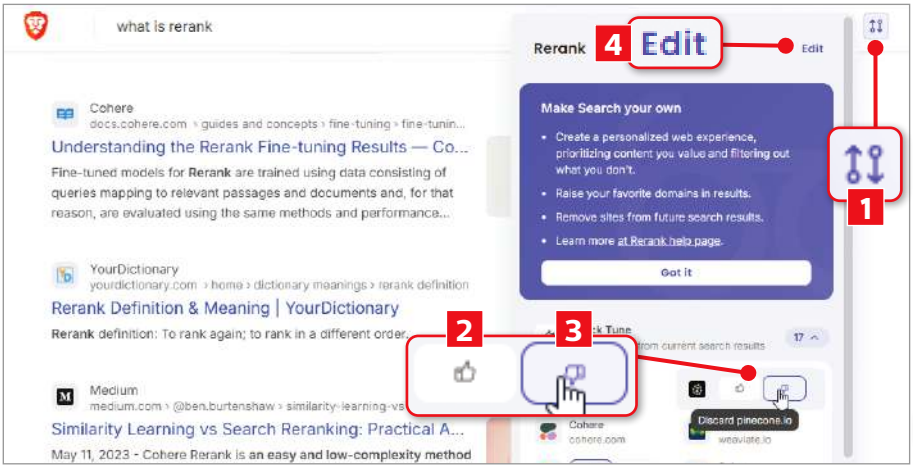
Most browsers now have a memory-saving feature that suspends – or 'unloads' – background tabs that are using an excessive amount of RAM. In Firefox, this works automatically to prevent the browser from freezing and when system memory is running low.

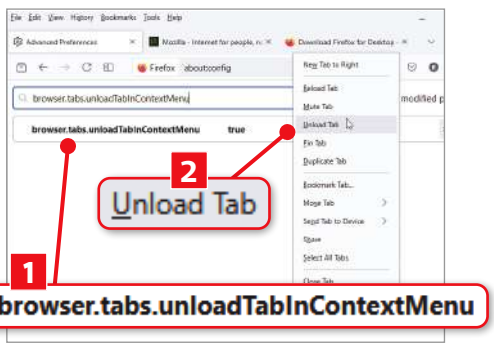
It also lets you suspend memory-hogging tabs manually by going to its Tab Unloading page (about:unloads) and clicking Unload. This keeps the tabs open but effectively puts them to sleep until you click and 'wake' them again

The trouble is that few Firefox users know about the Tab Unloading page, leaving it to the browser to detect and suspend RAM-guzzling tabs. To remedy this, Mozilla is testing a new option that lets you unload tabs directly from the right-click menu.

Although it's not yet available in the latest stable version of Firefox (135), you can activate the feature by tweaking a hidden setting. Type about:config in the address bar, press Enter and click 'Accept the Risk and Continue'.

Find the preference browser.tabs.unloadTabInContextMenu (1 in our screenshot below) and double-click it to change its value to 'true'. Right-click a tab and select the new Unload Tab option 2 to free up memory without closing the page.


what is rerank
Rerank
4
Edit
Edit
Make Search your own
Create a personalized web experience, prioritizing content you value and filtering out what you don't.
Raise your favorite domains in results.
Remove sites from future search results.
Learn more at Rerank help page.
Got it
1
Cohere
docs.cohere.com › guides and concepts › fine-tuning › fine-tunin...
Understanding the Rerank Fine-tuning Results — Co...
Fine-tuned models for Rerank are trained using data consisting of queries mapping to relevant passages and documents and, for that reason, are evaluated using the same methods and performance...
YourDictionary
yourdictionary.com › home › dictionary meanings › rerank definition
Rerank Definition & Meaning | YourDictionary
Rerank definition: To rank again; to rank in a different order
2
3
Medium
medium.com › @ben.burtenshaw › similarity-learning-vs
Similarity Learning vs Search Reranking: Practical A...
May 11, 2023 - Cohere Rerank is an easy and low-complexity method
Discard pinecone.io



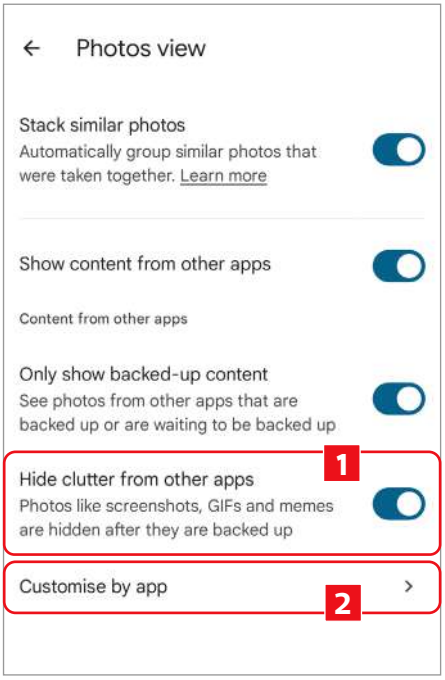
Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID

Hide clutter from other apps in Google Photos

Google Photos automatically stores and backs up pictures and videos you capture with your device's camera. But it also shows media content from other apps, including screenshots you've taken and GIFs and memes you've received in WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

All this extra stuff clutters your Photos feed, so Google has added new options to stop it appearing – without deleting the original files. Tap your profile icon in the top-right corner of the app and choose 'Photos settings', then Preferences.


Photos view
Stack similar photos
Automatically group similar photos that were taken together. Learn more
Show content from other apps
Content from other apps
Only show backed-up content
See photos from other apps that are backed up or are waiting to be backed up
Hide clutter from other apps
Photos like screenshots, GIFs and memes are hidden after they are backed up
1
Customise by app
2

Tap 'Photos view' to access the new settings. You can either switch off 'Show content from other apps' to stop all images from other apps appearing in Google Photos, or choose what to include and exclude.

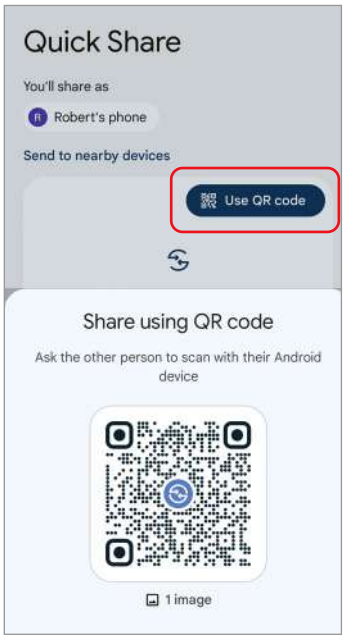
Select 'Only show backed-up content' to only see photos from other apps that have been backed up – which means you actively chose to save them. Turn on 'Hide clutter from other apps' (1 in our screenshot left) to remove screenshots, memes and GIFs from Google Photos.

Alternatively, tap 'Customise by app' 2 to allow content from some apps but not others. This includes Facebook, WhatsApp and Chrome, and 'Your screenshots and screen recordings'.

ANDROID

Share files between devices using QR codes

Google has updated its Quick Share feature for Android phones and tablets with the useful ability to share files with nearby devices using a QR code. This saves you having to detect and connect to other phones and tablets to quickly send photos, videos and documents to them via Bluetooth.



Simply select the file you want to share, tap the Share button at the top or bottom of the screen (depending on the app) and choose Quick Share. In the 'Send to nearby devices' box, you'll see a new 'Use QR code' option (see screenshot left). Tap this to generate a QR code for the file, which the other person can scan with their device's camera.

When scanned, the code will provide the other person with a Quick Share link. Tapping this will connect your devices and send them the file. If the transfer fails, ensure you both have Bluetooth enabled and your devices are within a 30cm range of each other.

ANDROID & iOS

Try new features in Vivaldi's mobile browser

Vivaldi has updated its mobile apps in line with the latest version of its desktop browser (see page 42). There

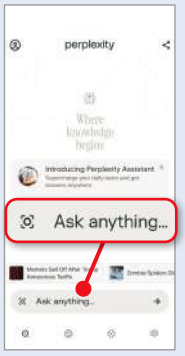
BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

Perplexity

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/53693
iOS www.snipca.com/53694

This AI-powered 'answer engine' is a cross between ChatGPT and Google search.



It quickly provides detailed and reliable responses to your queries and lets you ask follow-up questions. You can bookmark Perplexity's answers, save them to shareable 'spaces', and interact with the chatbot by typing or speaking.

Tumblr

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/53697
iOS www.snipca.com/53698

The long-running blogging community is taking on TikTok with its own entertainment service, Tumblr TV.

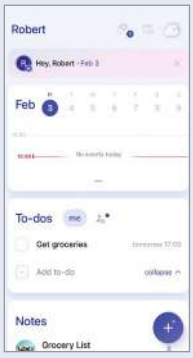
This is integrated with the main Tumblr app and lets you browse and watch short videos and GIFs in categories including Sports, Nature and Movies. Swipe through content vertically and 'like', comment on, repost or share it.

Hero

Free

iOS www.snipca.com/53700

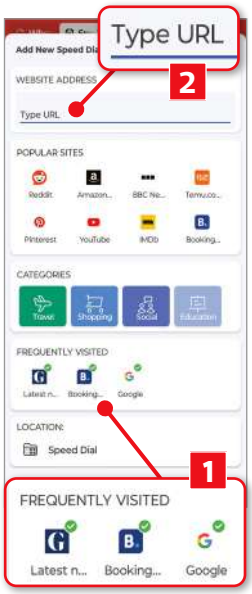
Hero is an all-in-one personal assistant that combines a calendar, to-do lists, notes and other useful tools. Its built-in AI assistant lets you schedule events, set up reminders and compile lists using your voice, and provides a daily briefing of things you need to do. You can also share your calendar, tasks and notes with other people.



*Contains in-app purchases

are lots of new features and improvements, though as with previous updates, these differ slightly between the Android (www.snipca.com/53689) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53691) browsers.

Both apps have simplified the process of adding website shortcuts to your Speed Dial page. Tap the Add button and you can now choose from popular sites in categories such as Travel, Shopping and Social, and your most frequently visited sites (1 in our screenshot below) as well as adding websites manually by typing their URLs 2.



Vivaldi has also introduced more ways to save web pages. Tap the 'V' menu, select the 'Add page to' option and choose between saving the page to your Start Page, Bookmarks, 'Reading list' or the home screen of your phone or tablet.

Another change affecting both browsers concerns Vivaldi's default search engine. Previously, this was Bing but it's now the privacy-focused Startpage. Other options include DuckDuckGo, Ecosia and Qwant, which all generate revenue for Vivaldi.

The Android app introduces a handy Reader View, which simplifies web pages by removing everything but the text. Just tap the 'V' menu and select Reader View.

The iOS app now has Vivaldi Translate, a feature already available on Android. When Vivaldi detects you're viewing a page in a foreign language, it will offer to translate the content into English.

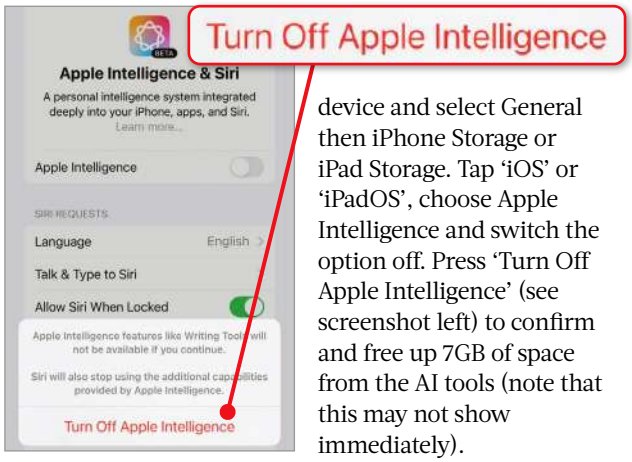
iOS

Reclaim storage space from Apple Intelligence

Although many iPhone and iPad users have welcomed the new AI-powered Apple Intelligence features, others are unable to get them because their devices aren't compatible. And some don't particularly want AI tools, but have been given them anyway, following the rollout of iOS 18.3 in January.

The problem is that Apple Intelligence now takes up 7GB of storage on your device, and it's enabled by default. This significantly reduces the amount of space available for more apps and features that you do frequently use.

Thankfully, it's possible to disable Apple Intelligence and reclaim the storage it's been allocated. Open the Settings app on your device and select General then iPhone Storage or iPad Storage. Tap 'iOS' or 'iPadOS', choose Apple Intelligence and switch the option off. Press 'Turn Off Apple Intelligence' (see screenshot left) to confirm and free up 7GB of space from the AI tools (note that this may not show immediately).


Turn Off Apple Intelligence
Apple Intelligence & Siri
A personal intelligence system integrated deeply into your iPhone, apps, and Siri.
Learn more...
Apple Intelligence
SIRI REQUESTS
Language
English
Talk & Type to Siri
Allow Siri When Locked
Apple Intelligence features like Writing Tools will not be available if you continue.
Siri will also stop using the additional capabilities provided by Apple Intelligence.
Turn Off Apple Intelligence

BEST APPS FOR... Installing browser extensions

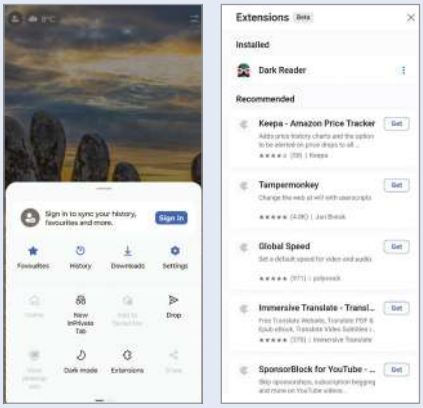
Edge for Android

Free

Android www.snipca.com/53705

Kiwi Browser, which let you use Chrome extensions on Android devices, was sadly discontinued on 25 January. As an alternative, you can use Edge to install 16 Chromium tools from Microsoft's Edge Add-ons store – tap the three-line menu button, choose Extensions and tap Get. Options include Tampermonkey, Dark Reader and Keepa.

Best For Installing Chromium extensions



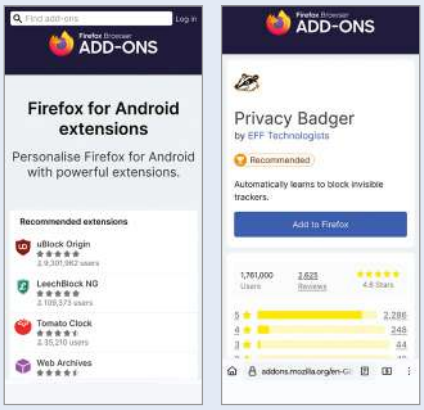
Firefox for Android

Free

Android www.snipca.com/53706

Firefox is the best Android browser for installing extensions, though Samsung's Internet browser also offers a good selection. It now supports more than 1,000 add-ons, including the popular tools uBlock Origin, Bitwarden, Privacy Badger and AdGuard. To browse and install them, tap its three-dot menu button and select Extensions.

Best For Installing Firefox add-ons



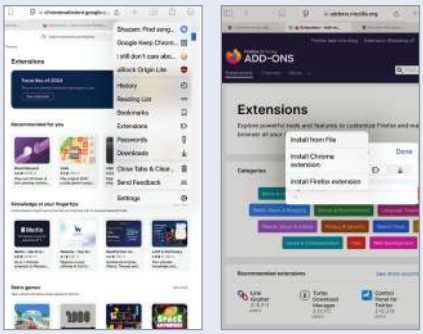
Orion Browser

Free

iOS www.snipca.com/53702

Aside from Safari, Orion is the only iOS browser to support extensions, though not all work as intended. Choose 'Extensions' in its main menu, tap the plus-sign button and select 'Install Chrome extension' or 'Install Firefox extension'. Orion also blocks ads and trackers, and has a Data Saver mode that loads web pages faster.

Best For Installing extensions on iOS

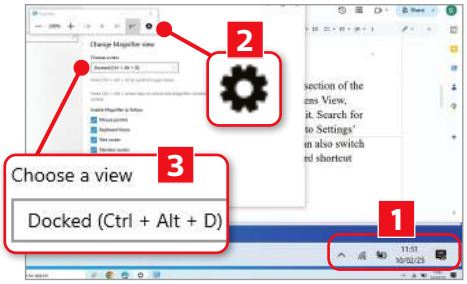


WINDOWS 10 & 11

Magnify a fixed part of your screen

Docked View in Windows Magnifier zooms in on a fixed section of the screen while keeping the rest visible. In our screenshot below we've magnified the notification area on the taskbar 1. This is different to Lens View, which follows your cursor and magnifies the area beneath it.

Search for and open Magnifier, or press Windows key+plus sign. Now click the Settings cog 2, then 'Go to Settings' and select Docked under 'Choose a view' 3. You can also switch to Docked View when Magnifier is open using the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Alt+D.

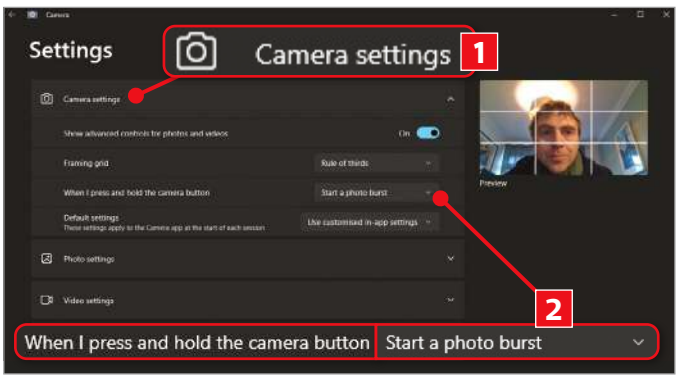


WINDOWS 10 & 11

Take multiple photos in the Camera app

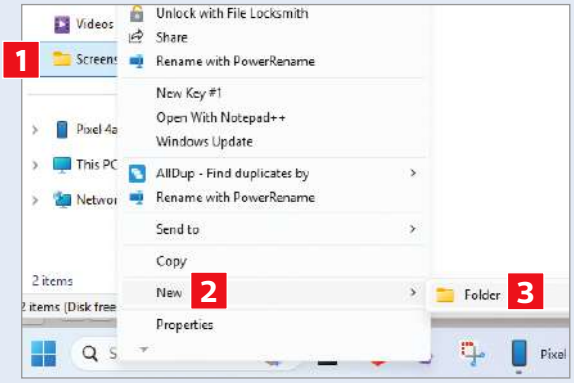
The 'photo burst' feature on phones takes multiple photos in rapid succession, letting you choose the best shot from the series. You can do the same in the Windows Camera app, capturing multiple expressions during a video call – increasing your chances of getting everyone looking their best.

First, search for and open the Camera app, then click the top-left Settings cog. Next, click 'Camera settings' (1 in our screenshot below) and in the 'When I press and hold the camera button' dropdown menu select 'Start a photo burst' 2.



WINDOWS 11

Open subfolders in File Explorer's left pane



Microsoft has updated File Explorer in versions 22H2 and 23H2 of Windows 11 to let you create subfolders directly from File Explorer's left pane. Previously, you had to open a folder in the right pane before creating a subfolder. To do this, right-click a folder (1 in our screenshot), then click New 2 followed by Folder 3.

The new option is part of Windows 11's KB5050092 update, released on 29 January. This was an optional update, so check whether you've installed it by opening Settings (press Windows key+I) then clicking Windows Update followed by 'Update history'. If it's not listed, go back to Windows Update and click 'Check for updates'.

Microsoft says the 'new folder' option is being added to computers "gradually", so even after installing KB5050092 you might need to wait for it to appear.

Now click the top-left arrow to go back to the main Camera screen. Click the Camera icon on the right and keep your mouse button or trackpad pressed down. A 'burst' of photos will now be taken. To see them all, click the small photo at the bottom right (this will be the most recent you took), then the three horizontal dots top right, followed by 'Open folder'.

WINDOWS 10 & 11

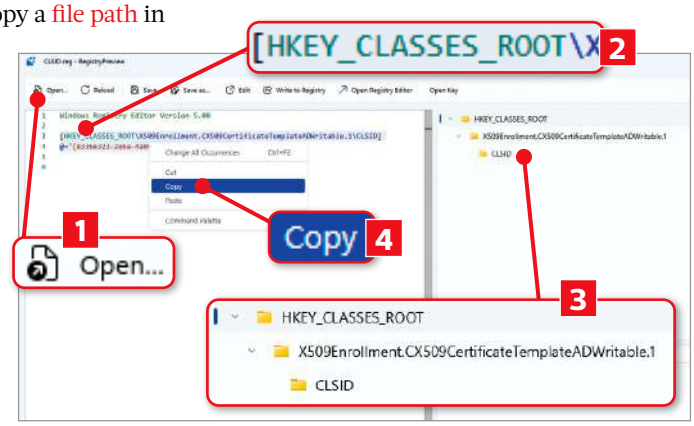
Copy file paths in Registry Preview

One of the cleverest tools in PowerToys is Registry Preview, which shows a neater version of the Windows registry than you'll find in Registry Editor. Version 0.88 of PowerToys, released in January, adds the option to copy a file path in Registry Preview. You can paste this wherever you like for future reference.

To use it, you first have to export a registry key from the traditional Registry Editor. Press Windows key+R, then type regedit and press Enter. Now navigate to and right-click the key you need, then click Export.

Now go back to Registry Preview, click Open (1 in our screenshot below) then find the key you just exported. Click this and it'll appear in the main pane 2, with the folder structure on the right 3. To copy the file path, select the whole of it then right-click it and choose Copy 4. You can now paste it where you like.

Note that to make any changes to the registry in Registry Preview you have to click 'Write to Registry' at the top.

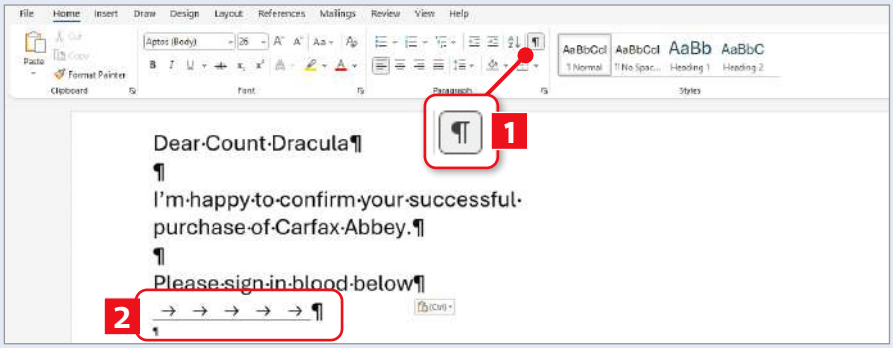


MICROSOFT WORD

Add underlined blank spaces in printed documents

If you need to print documents for people to sign or fill in, you can underline blank spaces so they know where to write. One option is to underline by pressing Shift+Hyphen, but it can be tricky to line these up – making forms look untidy.

A better method is to type blank spaces using the Tab key. First, click Home at the top followed by the 'Show paragraph' icon (1 in our screenshot). This shows other formatting marks such as tab spaces. Now position your cursor where you want the spaces to appear, then press the Tab key on your keyboard (two horizontal arrows pointing in opposite directions, usually to the left of Q). These spaces will be represented by arrows. Select the arrows then press Ctrl+U to underline them 2. Press the Tab key again to make the line longer, if needed. These lines will print, but not the arrows.



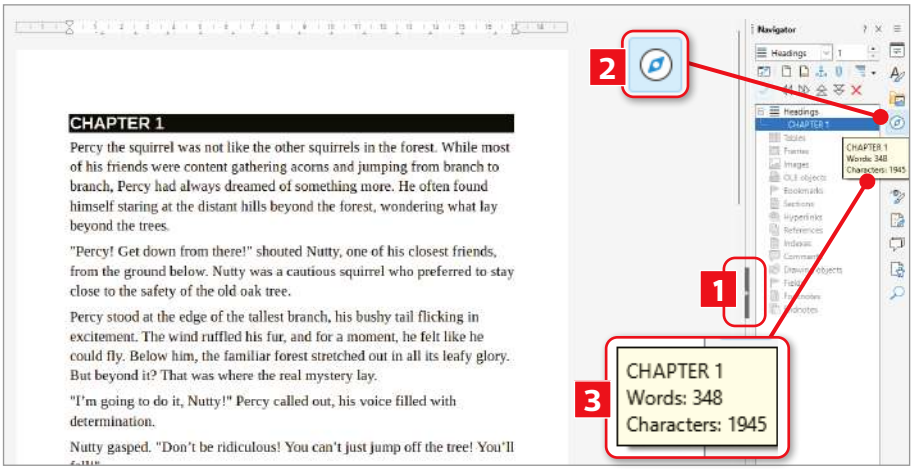
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

See word and character count as a tooltip

Version 25.2 of LibreOffice, released on 6 February, adds a new way of showing how many words and characters are part of the section under a heading.

To see this, click the 'Show' arrow at the right (1 in our screenshot below) to open the sidebar, then click the Compass icon 2 to open Navigator. Hover your cursor over one of the headings in the menu that appears and you'll see the words and characters as a tooltip 3.

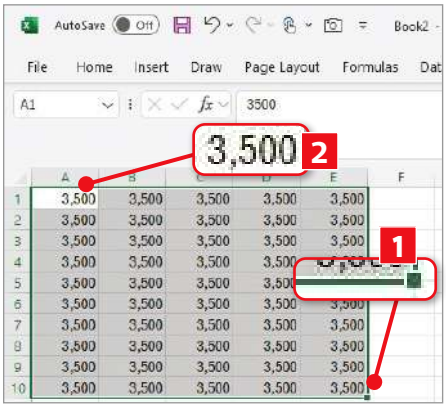
There are many more new tools in version 25.2, including for Calc, Impress and Draw as well as for Writer. We'll cover all the best ones over the next few months. Also note that this is the final version that will work with Windows 7 and 8.1.


CHAPTER 1
Percy the squirrel was not like the other squirrels in the forest. While most of his friends were content gathering acorns and jumping from branch to branch, Percy had always dreamed of something more. He often found himself staring at the distant hills beyond the forest, wondering what lay beyond the trees.
"Percy! Get down from there!" shouted Nutty, one of his closest friends, from the ground below. Nutty was a cautious squirrel who preferred to stay close to the safety of the old oak tree.
Percy stood at the edge of the tallest branch, his bushy tail flicking in excitement. The wind ruffled his fur, and for a moment, he felt like he could fly. Below him, the familiar forest stretched out in all its leafy glory. But beyond it? That was where the real mystery lay.
"I'm going to do it, Nutty!" Percy called out, his voice filled with determination.
Nutty gasped. "Don't be ridiculous! You can't just jump off the tree! You'll
Navigator
CHAPTER 1
Words: 348
Characters: 1945
1
2
3

MICROSOFT EXCEL & ONLYOFFICE

Quickly enter the same data in all cells

If you want the same data to appear in a selection of cells, you can highlight the main cell then click the 'Fill' handle at the bottom right (1 in our screenshot below left) and drag it to cover the cells you want. If you find this fiddly, try the Ctrl+Enter keyboard shortcut instead. Highlight the selection, then type in the highlighted cell 2. Now press Ctrl+Enter and whatever you typed will be shown in every selected cell. This shortcut doesn't work in LibreOffice Calc, so you'll have to use the Fill option.

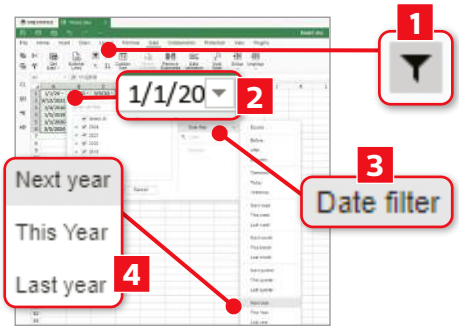


ONLYOFFICE

Filter spreadsheet data by dates

If you're working with large amounts of data in a spreadsheet, you can focus on specific time periods using OnlyOffice's date-filtering tool. Select the relevant cells, then click Data at the top followed by the Filter funnel icon (1 in our screenshot below).

Now click one of the filter arrows that appears in the cells 2, then 'Date filter' 3 and pick a date range. This ranges from specific days (today, tomorrow, yesterday) to years (next, this, last 4). The Equals option at the top lets you specify exact dates. Once you've clicked it, your results will be filtered to dates that match the range.

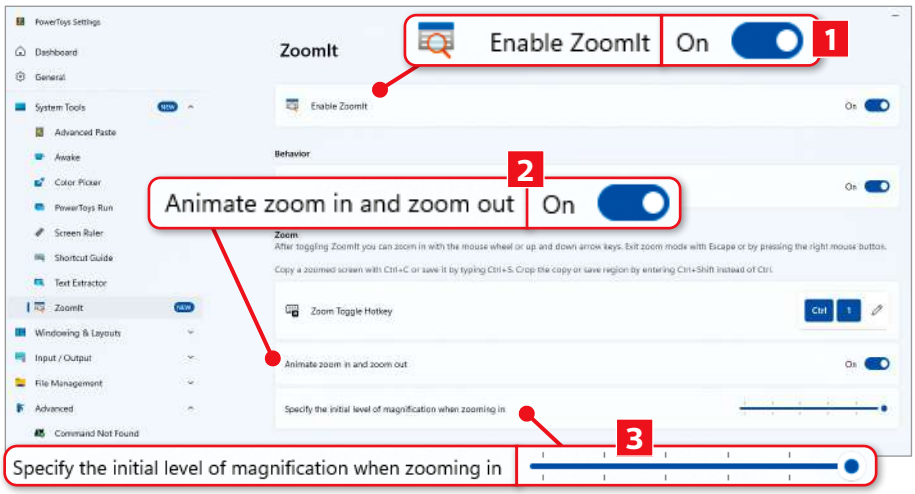


In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Zoom and annotate your screen while presenting

Microsoft has added a superb new tool to version 0.88 of PowerToys that lets you zoom in and annotate your screen while you're presenting. Called ZoomIt, the feature makes it easier for you to highlight certain parts of your presentation, helping to keep your audience engaged. Note that ZoomIt was already available as part of Microsoft's Sysinternals suite of tools. If you use this, you'll need to uninstall it in order to use ZoomIt in PowerToys.



Check 'Enable ZoomIt' is switched on, then choose the settings that match how you want to use it

Set your zoom settings

First, you need to make sure you're using the latest version of PowerToys. If you've already installed the program, open it then click General at the top right then 'Check for updates' on the right. If it shows 'v0.88.0' (or later), you'll be able to use ZoomIt. If you've not installed PowerToys do so through GitHub or the Microsoft Store – see www.snipca.com/53725 for instructions.

Now click System Tools on the left-hand menu, then ZoomIt, and make sure the 'Enable ZoomIt' slider is turned on (1 in our screenshot above right). Scroll down and you'll see lots of settings, but before selecting those you should have a play with the tool. Press the default keyboard shortcut (Ctrl+1) and you'll zoom into your screen.

You can move around with your mouse or trackpad as usual, and zoom in and out with your mouse wheel or keyboard's arrow keys. Stop zooming by pressing Escape on your keyboard.

Now let's take a proper look at those settings. You can choose to 'Animate zoom in and zoom out' 2, which adds or disables a visual effect to the zooming. Turn it on/off to see which you prefer. Below that is a slider for setting the magnification level when you zoom in 3.

Next is Live Zoom (Ctrl+4), which is more dynamic than the Ctrl+1 option because the zoom follows your cursor, updating in real time as you move it, rather than focusing on a fixed area of your screen. To zoom in this mode press Ctrl+Up/Down.

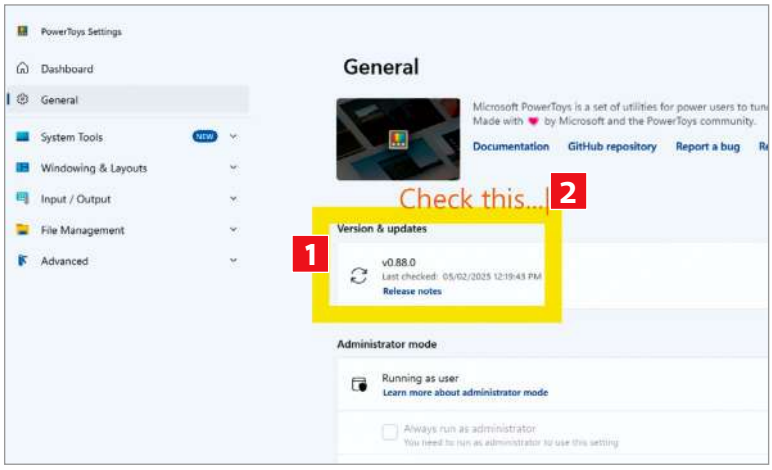
Annotate your screen

Once you've got the hang of zooming, try annotating your screen. When zoomed, click the left mouse or trackpad button and a red dot will appear on screen. Note that to annotate in Live Zoom you need to press Ctrl+2. Move your cursor to highlight what you want, and press Ctrl+Z to remove the last thing you drew, and E to delete it all. Press the space bar to place the dot in the centre of your screen.

Change the size of your annotations by pressing down the left Ctrl button and scrolling your mouse wheel, swiping your trackpad or pressing your keyboard's arrow keys. Under the 'Draw' heading you'll see keyboard shortcuts for changing the pen colour (G for green, B for blue and so on). You can also highlight and blur your annotations, as well as draw lines, rectangles, ellipses and arrows.

To type on screen, go into drawing mode as described above and press T. Use the mouse wheel/arrow keys to change text size. If you don't like the default font (Microsoft Sans Serif), click Choose Font and select another.

In our screenshot left, we used ZoomIt to draw a yellow box around the version number of PowerToys 1 and write orange text (press O) above 2. We thickened the rectangle's borders from the default, and changed the font to Noto Sans.



We used ZoomIt to add a yellow box and orange text

Next issue: Create Facebook Stories to promote events

What's All the

Fuss About...

Human-level AI

Prepare for tech that's better than you at almost everything

What is it?

Also known as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), it's AI that can think, learn and solve problems across multiple areas – much like a human. This makes it more powerful than current AI, which is designed to excel in single tasks, such as recognising images or translating languages.

So it's a multi-tasking AI?

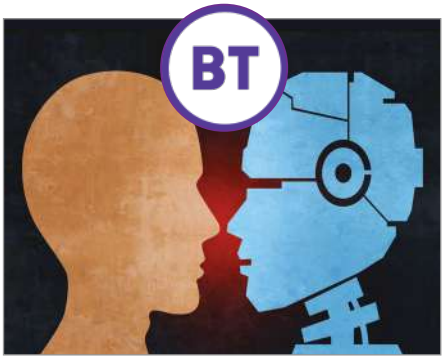
Exactly. It could write code, diagnose health problems, suggest recipes, create designs, solve tech issues around your house and much more – without needing to be retrained. It would learn as it goes and solve problems as they come up, just like humans do (or try to!) in different situations.

Does it exist yet?

No, but it's closer than many think. Sam Altman (pictured), head of OpenAI – which makes ChatGPT – says AGI is "coming into view". He predicts by 2035 every individual will have access to the same level of AI power that *the whole of the world* can use now.

Wow. Why is he so confident?

Because he claims AI is advancing faster than Moore's Law, which predicts that processor performance will double every two years (see www.snipca.com/53794). Also, the cost of using AI has been plummeting, making it cheaper to build more powerful systems. On his blog (www.snipca.com/53793) Altman wrote



BT plans to replace 10,000 workers with AI by 2030

that this could lead to "astonishing" economic growth, and "we can now imagine a world where we cure all diseases, have much more time to enjoy with our families, and can fully realize our creative potential". But there's a catch.

Thought there might be. What is it?

That the "balance of power between capital and labour could easily get messed up", which in plain English means millions of people losing their jobs as businesses rely on AI to perform more tasks. He warns this will lead to an increase in wealth inequality.

Isn't that already happening?

Yes, in roles that are repetitive and straightforward, especially data entry and customer service. Amazon, Barclays, McDonald's, HSBC, Sainsbury's, Sky and Tesco are just some of the firms that are using AI systems for jobs once performed by humans. BT plans to replace 10,000 workers with AI by 2030.

Does Altman have a plan to prevent it getting worse?

Sort of. One idea is to give everyone a 'Compute budget', which would allocate a set of AI resources for people to use, so they don't get left behind by the wealthy elite.

But how would that compensate anyone for losing their job?

It wouldn't. Instead it's intended to make sure AI tools are widely available, and that everyone benefits from them. Even Altman admits it sounds strange, and thinks AI tools could simply become so cheap that everyone can use them anyway. He also thinks governments might need to intervene to avoid mass unemployment – though some leaders might actually welcome AI taking over jobs.

Why's that?

Because it would make their citizens more dependent on the state. As Altman warns, there's a danger AI will be used "by authoritarian governments to control their population through mass surveillance and loss of autonomy". But overall he's optimistic that most people will be able to use the "unlimited genius" of AGI however they like, and that it will create more jobs than it destroys.

Is Sam Altman's own job safe?

We'd have thought so. And even if he is replaced by a mega-brained cyborg, his $2bn fortune should tidy him over for a while.

DITCH YOUR OLD TV HABITS

Enhance your streaming and downloads by embracing the latest innovations in TV viewing. Robert Irvine reveals amazing new ways to watch anything, anytime and anywhere

Our television-viewing habits have evolved considerably over the past 20 years. Gone are the days when the whole family tuned in every night to watch the same BBC and ITV programmes as 10 million other viewers. An Ofcom survey last year found that most young people (aged 16 to 24) don't watch live TV at all (www.snipca.com/53780), but prefer video-sharing services such as YouTube.

These changes in how, when and what we watch have led to speculation that the Government will scrap the TV licence fee, or – as we explained in Issue 703 (page 10) – extend it to cover streaming services including Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

Whatever happens, you shouldn't feel overwhelmed by the huge choice of viewing that's now available, but adapt your personal TV habits to embrace the latest innovations.

Here, we reveal the most exciting and entertaining developments in television over the past eight months (since our previous TV-themed cover feature: www.snipca.com/53128). These include useful new features from your favourite TV services, brilliant new channels you can watch for free and the best ways to save money by switching your streaming plan.

We also highlight the latest improvements to TV hardware and recommend the best devices to buy. However you currently watch TV, you're certain to benefit from updating your viewing habits.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Download entire series of TV shows to watch offline
- Play videos in picture-in-picture mode on your mobile device
- Unlock new Freeview channels by retuning your TV
- Stream hundreds of free channels showing classic shows
- Skip annoying ad breaks at the touch of a button
- Watch live and on-demand TV without an aerial

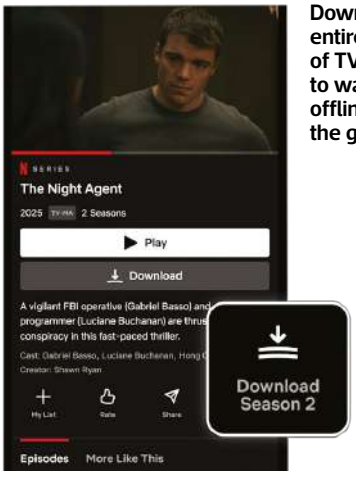
BEST NEW FEATURES ON STREAMING SERVICES

Download entire Netflix seasons to watch offline

Netflix finally lets you download entire series of TV shows to your iPhone or iPad with a single tap. The 'Season Download' feature has long been available on Android devices and lets you save every episode of a 'season' to watch offline, rather than downloading them individually.

This is particularly useful for binge-watching TV series when you can't get a reliable internet connection, such as while you're travelling. It also allows you to download whole seasons over Wi-Fi rather than streaming them on 4G or 5G and using up your monthly data allowance.

To use the option in the Netflix app for Android (www.snipca.com/53783) or iOS (www.snipca.com/53784), simply tap the 'Download Season [number]' button (see screenshot below) when viewing the details of a show. The selected season will be saved to the Downloads section of the My Netflix tab, where you'll have 30 days to watch the lot. You can still download individual episodes to your phone or tablet in the same way.

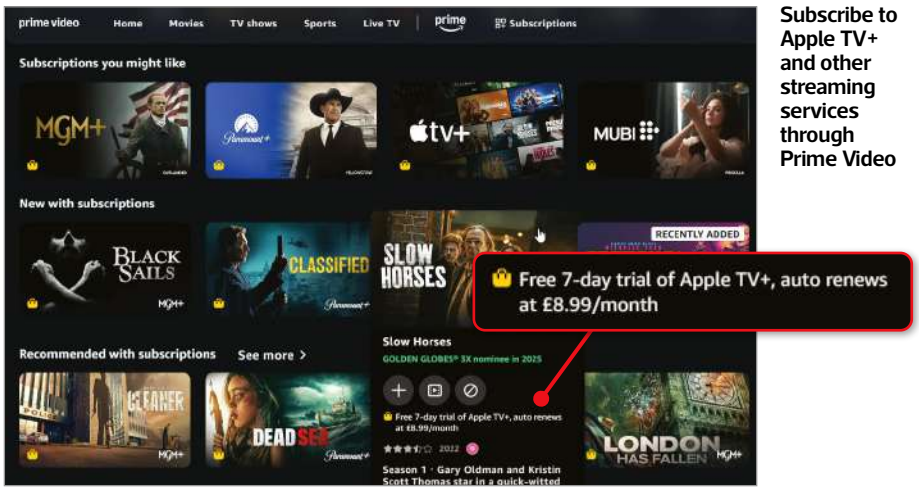


Download entire series of TV shows to watch offline on the go

Watch Apple TV+ and other services on Prime Video

If you've watched everything you want to on Prime Video, but are reluctant to install yet another TV app, you can subscribe to other streaming services as add-on channels. Last summer, Amazon redesigned the Prime Video website and app to make it much easier to browse and watch TV shows and films on third-party services.

Channels include Paramount+, MGM+, BFI Player and Discovery+, and last December Apple TV+ was added to the roster. This means you can stream acclaimed shows such as *Shrinking*, *Slow Horses* and *Severance* without installing the Apple TV+ app.



Subscribe to Apple TV+ and other streaming services through Prime Video

To see which channels are available through Prime Video, go to www.snipca.com/53732 in your browser, or select Subscriptions in the Prime Video app. Choose a channel, click 'Get started' and sign up. You'll need to pay for a subscription on top of your Prime membership, but most services – including Apple TV+ (see screenshot above) – offer a free trial and you can cancel at any time.

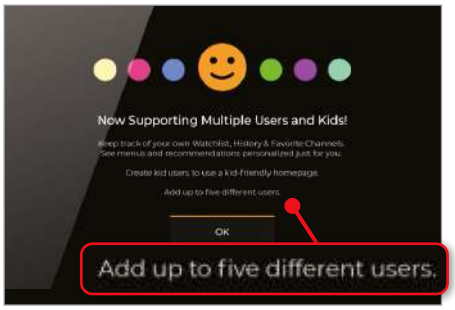
Since the redesign, Amazon displays the logos of channels in the bottom-right corner of content thumbnails so you can instantly see which service the show or film is available to stream on. It also uses a yellow shopping-bag icon to indicate which titles require extra payment, either as a channel subscription or as a rental or purchase from the Prime Video store.

You don't need a Prime membership or any other subscription to stream ad-supported content on Freevee. This is now integrated with Prime Video after Amazon shut down its standalone app.

Create separate Now TV profiles for each viewer

Most streaming services let you create separate user profiles, so family members can watch TV shows and films individually, without interfering with each other's viewing. One notable exception is Sky's Now streaming service, which can be watched on multiple devices simultaneously, but only via a single profile.

Thankfully, Now has removed this restriction as part of a major overhaul of its TV app. This allows you to add up to five user profiles to your account (see screenshot above), so each viewer can have their own watchlist, favourite channels and viewing history – which means you won't get 'Continue watching' prompts for series you've never seen.



The new Now TV app lets you add five user profiles to your account

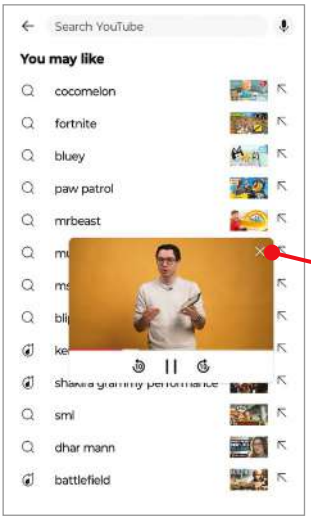
Similar to Netflix, you can assign a different avatar to each profile and set up special profiles for children with tailored content and parental controls. Just go into Settings, then User Settings to set up your first profile.

The revamped Now app began rolling out on 18 February, so make sure you've updated to the latest version on your TV and mobile devices.

Watch YouTube videos in a picture-in-picture player

Last October, YouTube redesigned the 'miniplayer' in its mobile app, to make it easier to keep watching videos while you browse other content. The feature was briefly rolled back following complaints about bugs, but it's now available to all Android and iOS users (though sadly not on TVs).

Previously, the miniplayer – which pops out when you swipe down on a video or tap the back button on your device – was limited to a horizontal bar



YouTube's new miniplayer lets you watch videos while you browse

that showed only a tiny thumbnail of the clip. It now works more like a picture-in-picture (PiP) mode within its own floating window, which you can move around your screen and resize as required. This differs from YouTube's official Picture-in-Picture feature, which continues playing videos when you close the app but is only available to Premium subscribers, unless you're in the US.

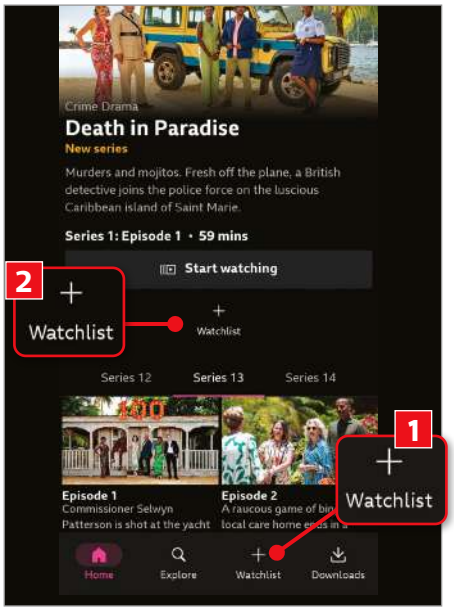
Launch the miniplayer by swiping down on a video or tapping back, then press its floating window in the bottom-right corner of your screen. Drag it to another corner to move it there, reverse-pinch it to enlarge the video and tap the 'X' in the top-right corner (see screenshot above) to close the miniplayer.

Watch ITVX shows while using other apps

Perhaps inspired by YouTube's miniplayer, ITVX has introduced a much requested picture-in-picture mode, though currently only for its iOS app (www.snipca.com/53734). This lets you continue watching shows and films in a small, floating window while you use other apps on your iPhone or iPad.

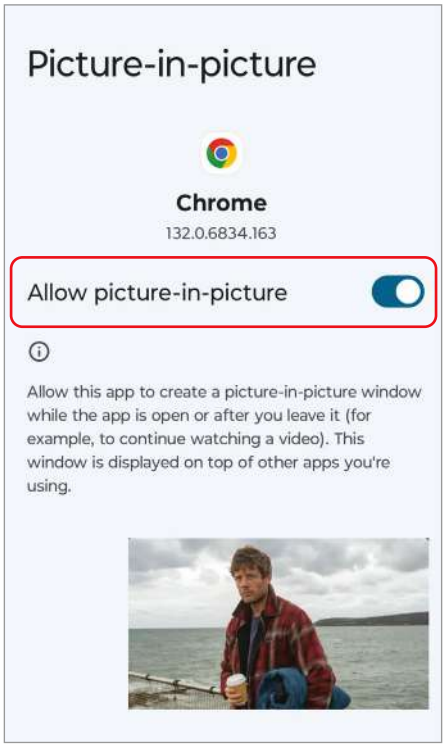
The picture-in-picture player can be resized and moved around your screen, and works with live and on-demand content on ITVX. To switch to PiP, simply press the Home button on your iOS device while playing a video – tap the icon in the top-right corner of the window to switch back to the main ITVX player.

While you wait for ITVX to add PiP to its Android app (www.snipca.com/53785), you can use picture-in-picture mode in your mobile browser. In Chrome, for example, start playing a show or film on the ITVX website, then press the Home button on your phone or tablet to switch to a floating picture-in-picture window.



BBC iPlayer now lets you add whole series your Watchlist with one tap

As with the new iOS feature, the PiP player can be resized and moved around your screen, and remains active while you browse other apps. If it doesn't pop out automatically, open Settings on your Android device, choose Apps (or 'Apps & notifications') and press 'Special app access'. Tap 'Picture-in-picture', select your browser and switch on 'Allow picture-in-picture' (see screenshot below). This will also work with most other streaming services.


Picture-in-picture
Chrome
132.0.6834.163
Allow picture-in-picture
Allow this app to create a picture-in-picture window while the app is open or after you leave it (for example, to continue watching a video). This window is displayed on top of other apps you're using.

Turn on picture-in-picture to watch TV shows in a floating player window

Manage your iPlayer Watchlist more easily

Last August, the BBC made some long overdue improvements to the Watchlist feature in iPlayer. It added a dedicated Watchlist tab (1 in our screenshot left) to the bottom toolbar in the Android and iOS app, which makes it much easier to access TV shows and films you've saved to watch later. Previously, you had to scroll down the home screen to find the Watchlist section.

BBC iPlayer now lets you add content to your Watchlist at a 'programme level', allowing you to save every episode of a series simply by tapping the '+ Watchlist' button 2. This change also applies to the iPlayer website, and its apps for smart TVs and streaming devices.

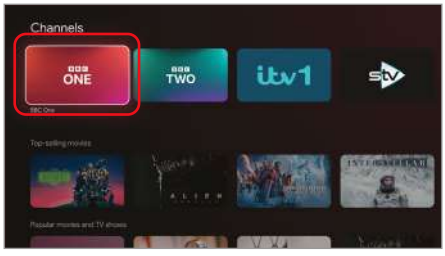
Shows in your iPlayer Watchlist are now listed in the order you added them, rather than alphabetically. Annoyingly you still can't download individual 'seasons', as you can with Netflix (see page 51).

Stream live channels instantly on Google TV

All the main UK broadcasters let you watch their shows as they're broadcast, as well as on demand, through the Live sections of their TV apps. However, as we explained in our Problems Solved section in Issue 702 (page 64), this isn't obvious to everyone and requires opening each app to get to its live channels.

To make things easier, Google has added a Channels section to its 'Chromecast with Google TV' device and new Google TV Streamer, which lets you access live TV directly from your home screen. Select the channel you want to watch – options include BBC One (see screenshot below) to Four, ITV 1 to 4, and STV, but not Channel 4 or 5 – to stream it live.

You'll need to have the relevant broadcasters' apps installed on your device. Because the live TV channels are streamed over the internet, you'll be able to watch them without a TV aerial. The same applies to new Freely TVs – see page 57 for more information.



The new Channels section on Google TV gives you instant access to live broadcasts

DISCOVER NEW TV CHANNELS & APPS

Retune your TV to get new Freeview channels

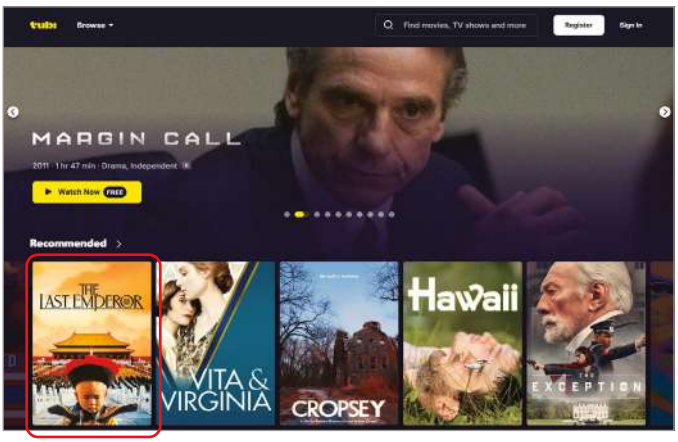
Despite having more viewers than all the streaming services combined, much of Freeview's choice of entertainment is overlooked – especially if you stick to the same old channels. Over the last six months, it's added several new ones you may have missed if you haven't retuned your TV or set-top box for a while.

Our favourite is Rewind TV, which became Freeview channel 95 last September (it's 182 on Sky). This shows classic British and US series from yesteryear, plus original programmes with a nostalgic bent, 24 hours a day. These include *The Prisoner* (pictured below), *Whicker's World* and *Shine on Harvey Moon*, and in March will be joined by *The Monkees*, US sitcom *Soap* and *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

Other recent additions include 'GREAT! Mystery' (channel 61), the "home of whodunnit" series and films; the nature-documentary channel U&Eden (57); That's Oldies (71 or 78), which plays old music videos; and GIGS (284), which screens live musical performances. Note that some channels are only available on internet-connected Freeview Play devices. See Freeview's website for instructions on retuning your TV or box: www.snipca.com/53737.

Credit: TVguide.co.uk

Ensure your Freeview TV gets the brilliant new Rewind TV channel, featuring *The Prisoner*



Tubi has a huge selection of free films, including several Oscar winners, like *The Last Emperor*

It's also worth checking Sky Mix (channel 11) for exclusive free content from Sky. For example, on 6 February the channel broadcast live the first night of the 2025 Premier League Darts season, which would usually require a Sky Sports subscription.

Watch free films you've actually heard of on Tubi

The free films on many streaming sites and apps are typically old black-and-white movies whose copyright has long since expired, or terrible low-budget flicks that nobody would want to pay for. So the launch of Tubi (www.snipca.com/53738) in the UK last July made for a refreshing change.

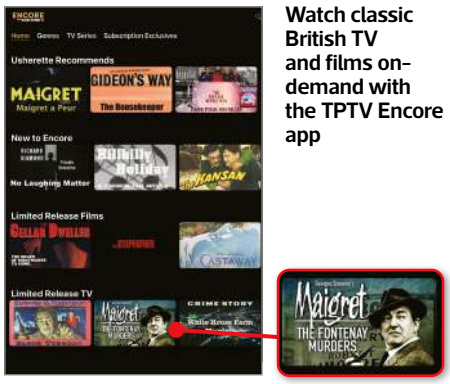
This free streaming service offers a massive choice of films, including recent and well-regarded titles that were screened in cinemas and you'll actually have heard of. At the time of writing, these included Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (pictured above, winner of the Best Picture Oscar for 1987), *Halloween* (the 2018 'soft reboot', starring Jamie Lee Curtis) and Steve Jobs biopic *Jobs* (2013). Tubi's library is regularly updated with fresh content.

You can watch Tubi in your browser and in its apps for mobile and streaming devices, without needing to sign up for an account – though doing so lets you create a watchlist and resume viewing where you left off. It's supported by ads, but these aren't as long and frequent as on many free services. It also includes several British TV series.

Enjoy classic TV on-demand with Talking Pictures TV

Talking Pictures TV is a brilliant place to watch classic British TV shows and movies, with its schedule encompassing everything from *Z Cars* and *Thunderbirds* to *Carry On* films and *Crown Court*. The channel is available on Freeview (channel 82), Sky, Virgin Media, Freesat and YouView, and last December launched an app for mobile and streaming devices.

TPTV Encore lets you watch selected content on-demand, so you can catch up with shows such as *Maigret* (pictured below) whenever and wherever you want. The app is available for iPhone, iPad and Apple TV (www.snipca.com/53739), Amazon Fire TV devices (www.snipca.com/53740) and Android/Google TV (www.snipca.com/53741), though not yet for Android TVs and tablets. Like the TV channel, it's supported by ads.



Watch classic British TV and films on-demand with the TPTV Encore app

Get set for Channel 5's new streaming service

Channel 5 is set to relaunch in March, with a new name and lots more content. It will now be called '5' across both its linear (ie, scheduled) TV channels and streaming service (currently My5) and let you watch shows and films from the Paramount 'family'.

This will include content from MTV Entertainment Studios, CBS and Comedy Central, plus selected series from Paramount+. There will also be a section for kids and families, featuring programmes from Milkshake! and Nickelodeon, and box sets from additional 'content partners'. Interestingly, 5 will use ad-supported FAST channels (see opposite page) to deliver its new programming, alongside its traditional live channels.

Computer active

READER OFFER!

ADD A DISC FOR £5.95

Upgrade to Windows 11 Pro for just £49.99!

Your PC almost certainly came with Windows 11 Home. But did you know it's easy to upgrade to **Windows 11 Pro** to get advanced features like BitLocker drive encryption?

There's no need to install a new version of Windows – just take your new Professional key, go to System, Activate, then select 'Change Product Key'.

To upgrade, visit **www.snipca.com/50563** and click the red **Buy Now** button on the right.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **11 March, 2025**.
It's a lifetime licence for one computer.

PAY LESS TO WATCH TV & FILMS

Ditch streaming subscriptions for free FAST channels

The last year has seen a huge increase in both the number and popularity of FAST channels. FAST stands for free ad-supported streaming television and works in a similar way to linear TV, but entirely over the internet.

Rather than choose individual TV shows and films to watch on-demand, FAST channels let you watch their content on a pre-programmed schedule. So if you start streaming a channel just after 2pm, you'll see whatever's playing at that time. Legally they are defined as 'live' channels, which means you need a TV licence to watch them (see www.snipca.com/53786).

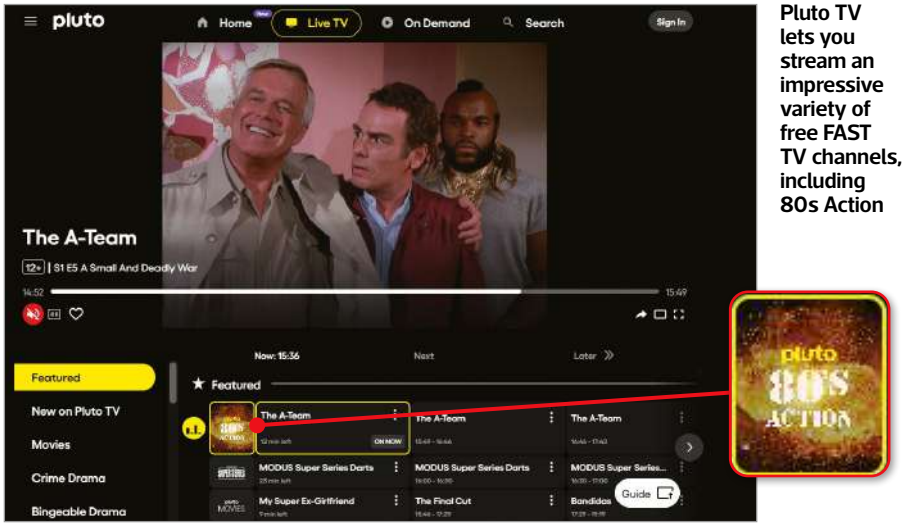
You can stream FAST channels without signing up for an account, but – because they're completely funded by advertising – you have to put up with ads. However, considering that many services now charge you to watch their content *with* ads, free FAST TV is a real bargain. It's a great reason to ditch at least one of your streaming subscriptions.

The excellent Pluto TV (www.pluto.tv) includes more than 250 FAST channels in its Live TV section, spanning categories including Movies, Crime Drama, Comedy, Documentaries, News and Sport. Last November, it introduced the channel Pluto TV 80s Action (pictured above right), which screens series including *The A-Team*, *Knight Rider* and *Miami Vice*, and two months earlier it added CNN Fast and CNN International.

Rival service Plex has over 350 'live' FAST channels (www.snipca.com/53743), with many devoted to specific programmes such as *Pointless*, *Escape to the Country* and *Mr Bean*. Last August, it partnered with A&E Networks to launch five new channels in the UK, including Inside Crime, History Hunters and World War TV.

Rakuten TV (www.snipca.com/53745) is another great place to watch free FAST channels, and was recently added to Virgin TV. You'll also find FAST channels on Prime Video (www.snipca.com/53747), including one for Australian soap *Neighbours*.

All the services we've mentioned can be streamed in your browser, on your mobile device and on your TV, through their respective apps. They also let you play shows and films on-demand, if there's nothing of interest in their schedules.



Pluto TV lets you stream an impressive variety of free FAST TV channels, including 80s Action

Save money by sitting through ads

One of the original benefits to paying for streaming services was that you could watch TV shows and films without sitting through adverts. But recently many have changed their business models to include ad-supported plans.

Netflix was the first to do so, introducing a 'Basic with Ads' tier in October 2022. It was soon followed by Disney+, Amazon Prime Video and – last November – Paramount+.

Nobody wants to have their viewing interrupted by ads, but it can save you a lot of money. A Netflix 'Standard with Ads' plan now costs £5.99 a month, equating to £71.88 a year, while its Standard plan is priced at £12.99 a month and £155.88 a year – more than twice as expensive. With Paramount+, you'll save £3 a month or £36 a year by opting for the new 'Basic (with ads)' plan (see screenshot below) over the Standard one.

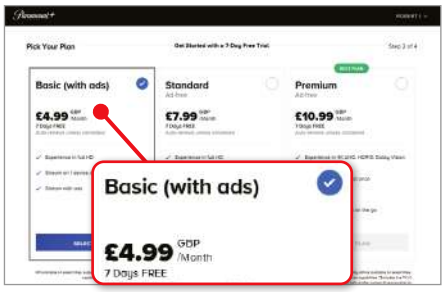
The ads are usually less frequent, lengthy and irritating than on ITVX, Channel 4 and most non-BBC Freeview channels. Netflix inserts about four minutes of adverts per hour, which are strategically placed so they don't cut in mid-scene and last from 30 to 60 seconds. Some viewers report seeing none at all when watching certain shows.

Combine your streaming services

In December, Sky launched a low-cost new TV plan that combines some of its own channels with Netflix and Discovery+. Priced £15 a month, Sky Essential TV (www.snipca.com/53749, pictured below) is available for the Sky Stream puck and Sky Glass TVs,including the new Sky Glass Gen 2 model, which went on sale in February (www.snipca.com/53797).

The package includes Sky Atlantic, Netflix 'Standard with Ads', Discovery+ and free-to-air channels such as BBC, ITV and Channel 4. Upgrade to Sky Ultimate TV for £22 a month for more channels, including Sky Showcase, U&Gold and National Geographic. You can add Sky Cinema and Sky Sports by purchasing add-ons.

Sky Essential TV should appeal to disgruntled TalkTalk TV customers, who – since January – no longer get Netflix and Now (which includes Sky Atlantic).



Paramount+'s new 'Basic (with ads)' plan saves you £36 a year compared with the Standard plan

Sky Essential TV combines Netflix with Sky Atlantic and Discovery+

BEST NEW FEATURES ON TV DEVICES

Control your TV from your web browser

In our 'Record and save TV shows' feature in Issue 693 (page 62 – buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53062), we recommended the Manhattan T4-R (www.snipca.com/52009) as the best way to record TV. This superb Freeview Play personal-video recorder (PVR) lets you watch live and on-demand content, fast-forward ads in your recordings and pause programmes as they're broadcast.

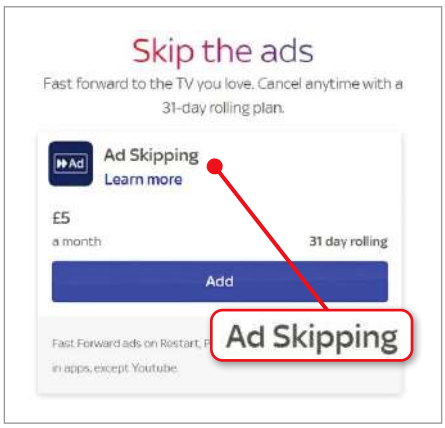
Since our feature was published, the PVR's software has been updated to add YouTube to its selection of streaming apps, improve its picture quality and let you control it via your web browser. This means you can browse, play and record shows from your PC or mobile device, without using the Manhattan T4-R's remote control (which is handy when you misplace it).

To activate the new Web Remote option, go into Settings on the Home screen and choose Internet, then Browsing Options. Select 'Web Remote', then enter the web address provided in the address bar of your PC or mobile browser. This will display an image of the Manhattan T4-R remote (see screenshot below), which you can use to control the PVR over your Wi-Fi network.

Last year, Amazon introduced a similar feature that lets you control your Fire TV device via a virtual remote and keyboard in your mobile browser. However, this only works with a few apps, such as Amazon's Silk browser, and involves scanning a QR code with your phone's camera to link it with your TV. You're better off installing Amazon's free Fire TV app for Android and iOS (www.snipca.com/53751), which also includes a virtual remote and keyboard.

Credit: Cord Busters

Control your Manhattan T4-R using a virtual remote in your browser



Buy the Ad Skipping pack to avoid ads on Sky Stream and Sky Glass

Skip the ad breaks on Sky Stream and Glass

In December, Sky introduced the useful option to skip adverts on its Sky Stream and Glass devices. When you're watching TV shows on demand, you'll see a Skip Ads button in the bottom-right corner of your screen whenever an ad break begins.

Select this option to skip all the ads and return to the main programme. The new feature also lets you fast-forward the ad breaks on ITVX, Channel 4 and STV Player. However, it doesn't work on Netflix or YouTube, or on live TV and online recordings. The only exception is when you use the Live Pause and Restart features, where it will allow you to skip ads before returning to the live broadcast.

To add the Skip Ads button to your Sky Stream or Glass TV package, you need to buy the Ad Skipping add-on pack, which costs £5 a month (see screenshot above). It isn't currently available for Sky Q. See www.snipca.com/53752 for more information.

Incidentally, the Sky Stream puck and Essential and Ultimate TV plans (see page 55) are now available to EE customers (www.snipca.com/53753).

Pair your hearing aid with your Fire TV

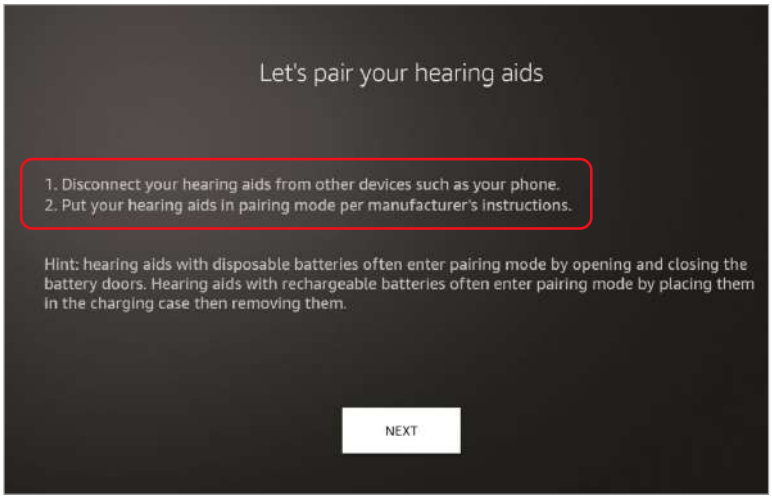
Amazon has expanded its support for 'Audio Streaming for Hearing Aids' (ASHA) technology, which sends TV audio directly to hearing aids. Its ASHA support now includes all Widex Moment behind-the-ear (BTE) and receiver-in-canal (RIC) hearing aids, allowing you to stream sound from compatible Fire TV devices.

These include the Fire TV Cube and TVs in its Fire TV Omni, 4-Series and 2-Series ranges, but frustratingly none of Amazon's Fire TV Sticks. To start using the feature and pair your Bluetooth hearing aid with a supported device, go to Settings on the Fire TV home screen and choose Accessibility, then Hearing Aids.

Select 'Add Hearing Aids' and follow the on-screen instructions (see screenshot below) to connect the devices. See Amazon's support page (www.snipca.com/53755) if you experience any problems.

Until the feature is added to Fire TV Sticks, you may be able to pair your hearing aid with your TV using the set's built-in Bluetooth function, as you would with wireless headphones.

If your TV doesn't have Bluetooth, consider buying a Phonak TV Connector, which costs from £139 (www.snipca.com/53756). This works over a range of 15 metres, supports multiple hearing-aid connections and lets you control the volume of streamed audio separately from the TV's sound level.


Let's pair your hearing aids
1. Disconnect your hearing aids from other devices such as your phone.
2. Put your hearing aids in pairing mode per manufacturer's instructions.
Hint: hearing aids with disposable batteries often enter pairing mode by opening and closing the battery doors. Hearing aids with rechargeable batteries often enter pairing mode by placing them in the charging case then removing them.
NEXT

You can pair your Bluetooth hearing aid with some Fire TV devices

UPGRADE YOUR TV-STREAMING DEVICE

Ditch your TV aerial for a Freely TV

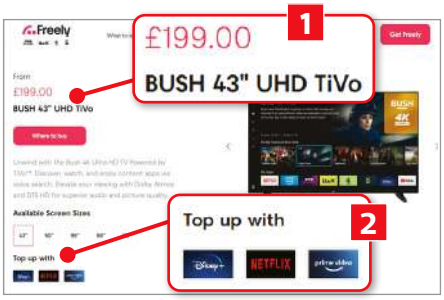
The most interesting recent development in TV hardware is the arrival of Freely (www.freely.co.uk). This collaboration between the UK's main broadcasters (under the name Everyone TV) lets you stream live TV channels and on-demand content over the internet, without an aerial, set-top box or satellite dish.

When Freely launched last April, we were unimpressed by the small number and high price of compatible TVs, and limited choice of channels. Thankfully, over the last six months, Freely has improved considerably.

In January, it added eight live channels including True Crime, PBS America, Legend, GB News and QVC. This brings its total to 40 (see www.snipca.com/53757 for the full list), with more promised soon. You can get all the standard free-to-air channels by connecting an aerial.

It has also introduced a My List feature you can use to save programmes to watch later. This complements its clever TV guide, which lets you switch seamlessly between live broadcasts and catch-up shows on all the main channels.

You can now buy a Freely TV, specifically the Bush 43in UHD TiVo (www.snipca.com/53758), for as little as £199 (1 in our screenshot below), and dozens of other models from various manufacturers. As they're smart TVs, they also support streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ 2.



Freely TVs are now more affordable and offer a wider choice of viewing

Is Freely coming to Amazon's Fire TV?

Amazon announced last October that Freely would soon be available on some of its new Fire TV devices – though it hasn't arrived yet. It will initially launch on Fire TV Omni QLED Series and Fire TV 2-Series sets, but won't be added to existing Fire TVs that use Freeview Play.

Freely will be integrated with the Fire TV interface, to give you instant access to live channels and on-demand content from the main UK broadcasters. Several TVs that use Amazon's Fire TV OS, including new TCL and Panasonic models, already have Freely.

Sadly, it's unlikely Freely will come to Fire TV sticks because the hardware won't support it. Ignore the Freely app in the Amazon Appstore (www.snipca.com/53766), which won't give your stick access to the service.

Upgrade your smart TV for under £150

Last summer, Roku – which appears to be moving away from its popular streaming sticks – launched its new Veltech range of TVs in the UK (www.snipca.com/53760), offering premium features for budget prices.

The cheapest is the Veltech VR32HX230 (pictured below), which costs a mere £139 (www.snipca.com/53761). This 32in Full HD TV includes voice control (through Roku's mobile app or your preferred smart assistant), Dolby Audio, live and on-demand TV via Freeview Play and access to Roku's thousands of free channels, as well as your favourite streaming services.

For superior quality, the 43in Veltech VR43UX230 features 4K Ultra HD resolution with HDR10 support, and is priced at a still-bargain £209 (www.snipca.com/53763). These Roku TVs are currently available exclusively from Ao (www.ao.com).

Roku's new Veltech VR32HX230 smart TV costs a bargain £139

Ditch your streaming stick to get more storage

Streaming sticks include very little built-in storage, and most of their space is taken up by the TV operating system. This helps keep their cost down, but also means you quickly run out of space for new apps.

Google's new TV Streamer (www.snipca.com/53764, pictured below), which went on sale last September, avoids this problem by offering 32GB of storage – four times the amount of its predecessor, the 'Chromecast with Google TV'. It also has 4GB of RAM (double the Chromecast's) and an Ethernet port to give you a fast and reliable internet connection.

The Google TV Streamer has 32GB of built-in storage

We were initially dismissive of the Google TV Streamer, because of its comparatively high price (£99) and its lack of BBC iPlayer and Channel 4 apps. It now has the latter and the BBC app is coming soon, once a 'technical issue' is fixed (www.snipca.com/53765). In the meantime, you can cast iPlayer content from its mobile app. ca

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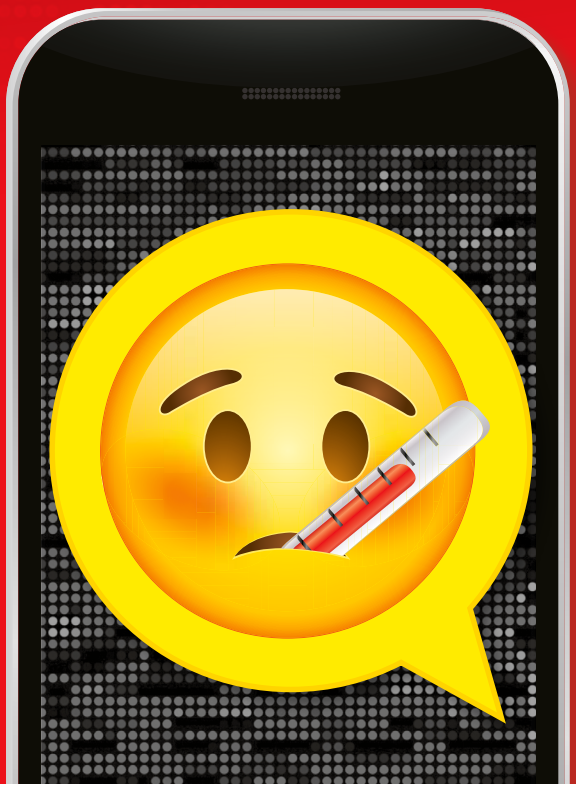
Is your phone screen MAKING YOU ILL?

A flickering screen can cause headaches, nausea and other health problems. **Robert Irvine** explains the dangers of PWM and how to reduce its effects



If you've ever had a headache, felt dizzy or nauseous, or experienced blurred vision while using your phone, it might be due to pulse width modulation (PWM). This is a screen-dimming method many phone manufacturers use, which doesn't actually dim your screen at all.

Instead, PWM rapidly turns your phone's display on and off to fool your eyes and brain into perceiving that the screen is getting dimmer or brighter. When you decrease the brightness, the display continues to flash on and off hundreds of times per second but at a slightly lower frequency.

That difference between the screen being on for a split second then going off for a split second can be incredibly jarring to the brain. While PWM affects some phone users more than others, exposure to a strobing light can lead to health issues. It's similar to the way a flickering fluorescent light can make you queasy.

How common a problem is PWM?

Smartphones have traditionally used direct-current (DC) dimming to control the brightness of their screens. This regulates the amount of voltage an LED panel receives, so the more power you supply, the brighter the LED. When you reduce that power, the screen dims.

As smartphones began to switch to OLED displays, manufacturers started using PWM to manage brightness rather than DC dimming. The advantage is that each on-screen pixel receives 100 per cent of the available power, ensuring colour accuracy and intensity stay the same, regardless of the brightness level. PWM also conserves battery life and prevents screen 'burnout'. The downside of PWM is that switching the screen on and off causes a flicker that can affect your eyes and brain and make you feel ill.

Most Google Pixel phones have a low PWM frequency of 240Hz

While many phone manufacturers have moved away from PWM, major brands including Samsung, Apple and Google still use it on their devices. They may describe their screens as 'flicker-free', but this simply means your eyes can't see the display rapidly turning on and off.

Most Samsung Galaxy and Google Pixel phones (pictured above right) flicker at a very low rate of 240Hz, or 240 times per second. Apple iPhones use a frequency of 480Hz. Higher frequencies are easier on your eyes, even when using PWM to 'dim' a display, but none of these phones go far enough. Research suggests that the 240-960Hz range is the most dangerous for human health, which means Apple, Samsung and Google are potentially putting PWM-sensitive users at risk.

Is PWM only a problem on phones?

No, PWM is used by displays on all manner of devices, including tablets, laptops, monitors and smart TVs. Even some LED lightbulbs are 'dimmed' using PWM rather than reducing the actual brightness.

However, because we use our phones at such close range, it's the most common cause of ailments among PWM-sensitive people. Thankfully, there are a few helpful ways to stop it affecting you.

How to stop PWM making you ill

Disable the automatic-brightness option

Automatic brightness, which adjusts your screen to suit the ambient light levels in your surroundings, is a great feature on phones that use DC dimming and can helps reduce eye strain. But on devices that use PWM, automatic brightness is a quick way to get a headache.

That's because PWM-dimmed phones flicker more severely at lower brightness levels, increasing the potential for PWM sickness. Instead, you should manage the brightness yourself to keep it at a level you feel is manageable and doesn't hurt your eyes.

Back
Display & Text Size
Colour Filters
Off
Colour filters can be used to differentiate colours by users who are colour blind and aid users who have difficulty reading text on the display.
Reduce White Point
73%
Reduce the intensity of bright colours.
Auto-Brightness

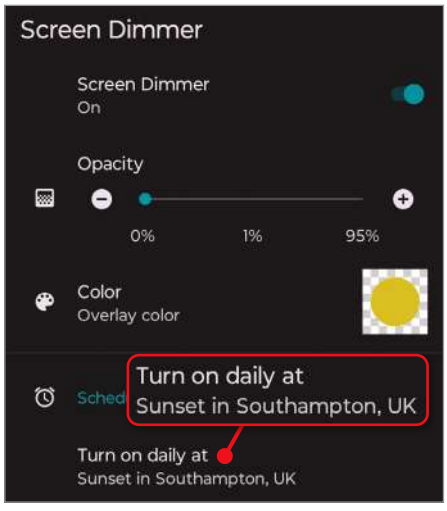
Switch off Auto-Brightness to limit your iPhone's PWM dimming

To disable automatic brightness on an iPhone or iPad, open the Settings app and select Accessibility then 'Display & Text Size'. Swipe down to Auto-Brightness and turn the option off (see screenshot above). On an Android phone or tablet with an OLED screen, open Settings, tap Display and switch off 'Adaptive brightness'.

You can also disable the feature on your PC or laptop. In Windows 11, open the Settings app and choose System then Display. Click 'Brightness' and untick 'Change brightness automatically when lighting changes'. In Windows 10, type power in the search box and select 'Edit power plan'. Click 'Change advanced power settings' then Display and turn off 'Enable adaptive brightness' (not all PCs have this option).

Install a screen-dimming app

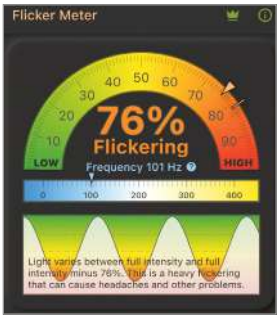
When you use your phone's brightness-level slider to dim the screen, it does so using PWM to maintain high image quality. Our sister website Android Central (www.androidcentral.com) recommends never dimming your display below 50 per cent, and using a screen-dimming app instead.



Schedule 'Screen & Notifications Dimmer' to dim your screen

Test your devices for flickering

You can check if lights, screens and other LED devices in your home are producing an imperceptible but headache-inducing flicker by installing LED Light Flicker Meter. Available for Android (www.snipca.com/53803) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53804), this app detects constant light flickering that's too fast to see – such as that caused by PWM.



Point your phone's camera at the light source and Flicker Meter will tell you the flickering percentage – the difference between the maximum and minimum light output – and whether you should be concerned. For example, if the light is flickering by more than 50 per cent (see screenshot), it's likely to cause eye strain, headaches and other health problems.

The app is free to use for 14 days, then requires a subscription of 99p a month.

One of the best free options for Android devices is 'Screen & Notifications Dimmer' (www.snipca.com/53799). Rather than simply applying a grey overlay (as rival apps do), it instantly dims your display without using PWM and restores it to its previous brightness when you shake your device. You can also schedule your screen to darken and lighten at specific times of day (see screenshot below left).

The Motorola Edge+ lets you completely disable PWM dimming

Apple's strict controls over apps and hardware mean there aren't many reliable screen-dimming apps for iOS. However, you can mitigate some of the problems PWM causes by reducing 'white point' (the intensity of bright colours) instead of brightness. Go to Settings, Accessibility then 'Display & Text Size'. Switch on Reduce White Point and drag the slider to the right.

Lock your screen's refresh rate

As with your computer monitor, the refresh rate of your phone's screen determines how many times per second it displays an image. Many devices have a dynamic refresh rate, which changes depending on which app you're using or what you're doing with your phone.

Because the PWM frequency remains constant (until your screen is dimmed or brightened), your eyes need to cope with both its flicker and the varying refresh rate, which can lead to headaches and visual problems. For this reason, it's wise to lock the refresh rate to keep it steady.

On an Android device, go to Settings then Display and look for the option 'Display refresh rate' or similar. Tap this and set a fixed refresh rate of 60Hz, rather than an automatic or dynamic one. On newer iPhones and iPads, you can lock the refresh rate by going to Settings, Accessibility, Motion and switching on Limit Frame Rate.

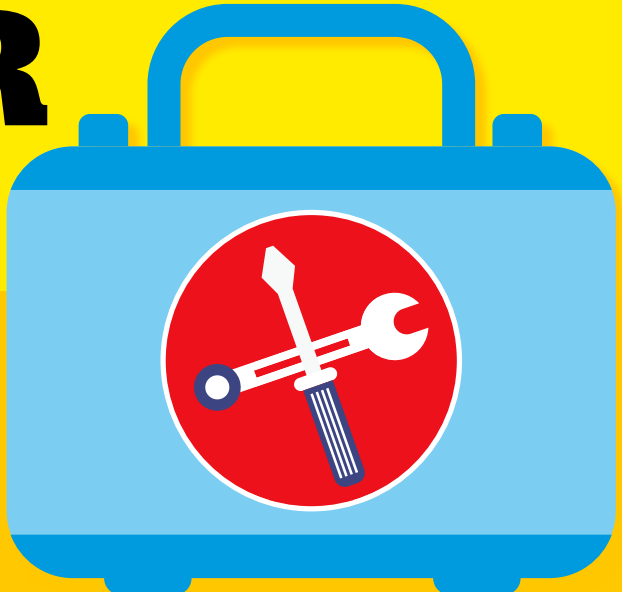
Switch to a phone with safer dimming

Not all phones with high-resolution displays rely on PWM for screen dimming. All OLED-equipped Motorola devices, including the Edge+ (pictured above), let you disable PWM dimming entirely, while phones including the OnePlus 13, Honor Magic 7 Pro and Nothing Phone (2) use a hybrid dimming method.

At medium to high brightness, these phones use DC dimming to adjust the voltage to the screen. At low brightness levels, usually under 30 per cent, they switch to PWM dimming but use a high refresh rate, typically above 1,920Hz, to reduce the impact on your eyes.

Android Central has a round-up of the best phones for people who are sensitive to PWM and screen flicker at www.snipca.com/53801. ca

BUY FIX-IT KITS FOR YOUR DEVICES



You no longer have to trudge down to a repair shop to sort out tech problems – there are plenty of DIY kits online with the tools and parts you need. **Daniel Booth** explains where to find them

For many years, DIY meant fixing things like leaky taps, wonky shelves and creaky floors. Now it's expanded to include the electronic devices we use every day. Under pressure from 'right-to-repair' campaigners, Apple, Samsung and other major manufacturers now offer kits to fix faulty phones, laptops, tablets and other gadgets. These started in the US and have now come to the UK.

What's significant is these kits contain *official* repair equipment, so you don't risk using any parts that might not be up to the job. And when manufacturers don't offer repair kits, third-party sites like iFixit fill the gap. Just be aware that attempting a repair can affect your warranty (see box opposite).

What kind of parts can you buy?

For phones and tablets, iFixit and similar stores offer common replacement parts such as screens (£35–£200), batteries (£15–£40) and charging ports (£10–£30), with prices varying based on model and part quality. Smaller internal components, such as camera modules, headphone jacks and others, range from £5 to £70.

For laptops and desktops, you can buy keyboards (£30–£100), trackpads (£20–£60), mouse feet (£14–£19) and speakers (£15–£40), plus more advanced components such as hard drives (£30–£150), RAM (£20–£100) and cooling fans (£10–£30).

Priced £65, the Pro Tech Toolkit is iFixit's best-selling repair kit

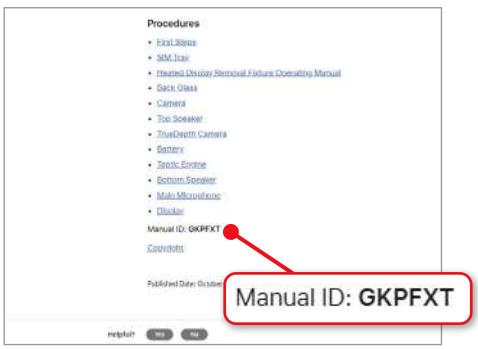
In addition to parts, iFixit and other stores provide a range of essential tools, such as precision screwdrivers (£10–£30), tweezers (£3–£14), spudgers (£3–£10), suction cups (£5–£15), thermal paste (£5–£15) and adhesive strips (£5–£20). You can also buy these in full repair kits (£20–£200) for specific devices and more general tech help. The best-selling of the latter is the Pro Tech Toolkit (£65 from www.snipca.com/53828, pictured above).

Start with iFixit, but download manuals first

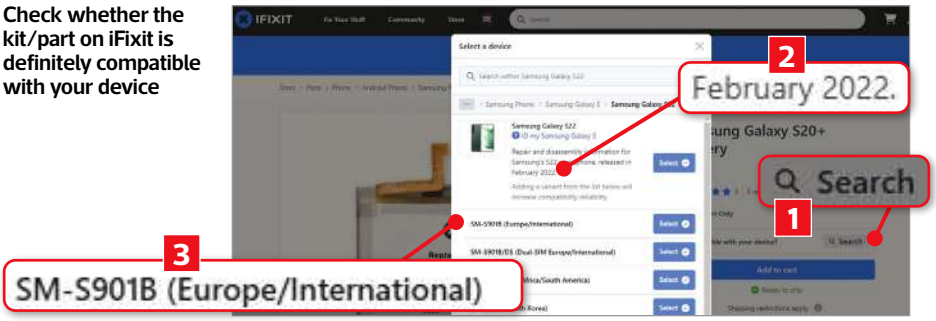
Because it's independent with few overheads and gets parts from a range of manufacturers, iFixit can sell repair kits cheaper than official sites. For example, this iPhone Pro 12 screen-replacement kit (www.snipca.com/53829) costs £92, around £200 less than on Apple's site. Apple (and other manufacturers) would argue you're paying for higher-quality parts on their sites, but iFixit's global popularity suggests many people disagree – or are prepared to pay a lot less for parts that might be only slightly inferior.

But before shopping on iFixit, download and read repair manuals from manufacturers' sites to ensure you'd be capable of carrying out the repair. These will also tell you which equipment you need. You can return to these sites later if iFixit doesn't sell what you need.

For **Apple** visit www.snipca.com/53812, then click through to your product and click the 'Repair Manual' link below the Documents heading. Now scroll to the bottom of the Contents page and make a note of the Manual ID (see screenshot below) – you'll need this later. Scroll back up through the Contents page to see if it includes your device's problem. If so, click it for instructions and the parts you'll need to order.



Scroll to the bottom of the Contents page then make a note of the Manual ID



Check whether the kit/part on iFixit is definitely compatible with your device

For **Samsung**, visit www.snipca.com/53815 then search for your device, selecting the product model code if you need to. Now download the Safety Guide and User Manual that appear below.

Most of the parts **Microsoft** sells on its repair site (www.snipca.com/53819) are for the Surface Pro laptop (11th generation), released last year. These include batteries, cameras, kickstands and speakers. Scroll down though and you'll find parts for earlier models, like the Surface Pro 8, 9 and X. Click an item then click the 'read the repair manual' link on the following page to download a PDF.

For **Google's** Pixel phones, visit www.snipca.com/53816 then click the 'repair options' link. In the Help box that appears, scroll down and click the 'learn how to repair your own Pixel phone' link, then scroll down and click 'Find and download repair manuals for your device'. Now select 'English manuals' then download the documents relating to your device.

Finally, for **Dell** visit www.snipca.com/53823, then search for your PC model. Click 'Manuals and Documents' on the left, then download what you're shown.

Buy a self-repair kit from iFixit

If you don't find what you want on the official sites, there's only one third-party alternative to try: iFixit. It has over 116,000 free repair guides (see www.snipca.com/53826) for 63,000 devices, and sells parts for many of them. As well as computers, phones and tablets these include cameras, printers, speakers and gaming consoles, plus loads of household appliances.

Start at iFixit's store (www.snipca.com/53827) if you know your device's exact model or the part you need. If not, visit the homepage (www.ifixit.com) and search for your device. The next page will show you which repair kits and parts it sells for your device (under the Store heading). Click 'See all' at the top right. If you don't know which you need, click your device further down the page and see if there are any guides for it.

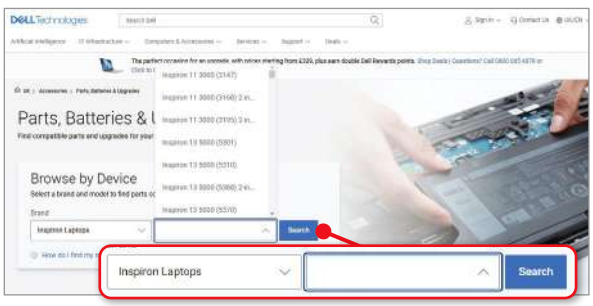
When you click a kit or part, click the Search button to the right of 'Compatible with your device?' (1 in our screenshot above). This will show precise information about the device the kit/part works with. Look for an exact model number, a release date 2, and whether it's the UK model. The latter is sometimes shown as Europe/International – as for most Samsung devices 3 – while for Apple devices it's typically Global.

Buy from manufacturers' official sites

When **Apple** launched its Self Service Repair scheme in the UK in late 2022 it was criticised for making the kits too expensive and the repairs too complicated. It also only covered iPhones, but now includes headphones, Macs and monitors. Sadly, iPads are still excluded.

Visit www.snipca.com/53809 then click 'Sign in' at the top followed by 'Create account'. Fill in your details and verify your email. Now go back to the homepage, click 'Start your order' and select your device via the dropdown menus, or enter its serial number in the box below (learn how to find it at www.snipca.com/53810). If you choose the menus, select the option showing just the device (for example, 'iPhone') not 'iPhone – Tools only'. On the right you'll need to select a repair type, such as glass, speaker or camera.

Apple splits its results into Genuine Apple Parts (which you need to buy to replace your faulty components) and Apple Tools (which you can buy to carry out the fix, or use your own equivalents).



Use Dell's dropdown menus to select your computer before looking for parts

Does self-repair affect your warranty?

Yes, it can. Manufacturers can set any terms they like in warranties, and many of them will prevent you from fixing a device yourself. It's unlikely a judge will ever rule that such a condition is unfair.

But Apple and Samsung *do* let you use their repair kits without breaking your warranty (there'd be little point selling these kits otherwise). However, you *will* void the warranty if you damage your device during the attempted repair.

It's riskier buying an unofficial repair kit from iFixit because you're almost guaranteed to void your warranty. So, why do it? Well, if you broke the device yourself then you may have already voided the warranty, leaving you with no choice. Or the device might be so old that it's out of warranty. Remember that if your device is inherently faulty, then you should use the Consumer Rights Act to seek help (www.snipca.com/53837). This trumps any warranty.

On the checkout page you'll need to enter the Manual ID you made a note of earlier. **Samsung** brought its self-repair scheme to the UK in 2023, letting you fix Galaxy phones, tablets and laptops. Visit https://buysamsungparts.com then find your phone, tablet or laptop and click 'View parts' to order what you need.

PC manufacturers don't sell repair kits as such, but you can buy replacement parts. **Dell** has the easiest site to use – visit www.snipca.com/53820 then click Find Parts and use the dropdown menus to find your computer (it includes laptops and desktop PCs, see screenshot below left). From there it's easy to add a part to the checkout.

At **HP's** site (www.snipca.com/53824), which sells parts for printers as well as computers, you'll need to enter your computer's service tag – it shows you where this is. **Lenovo's** site (www.snipca.com/53825) is similar, giving you three search options: Machine Info (serial number of computer); Part Number (serial number of replacement part you want); and Part Name (adapter, battery etc). ca

Problems Solved

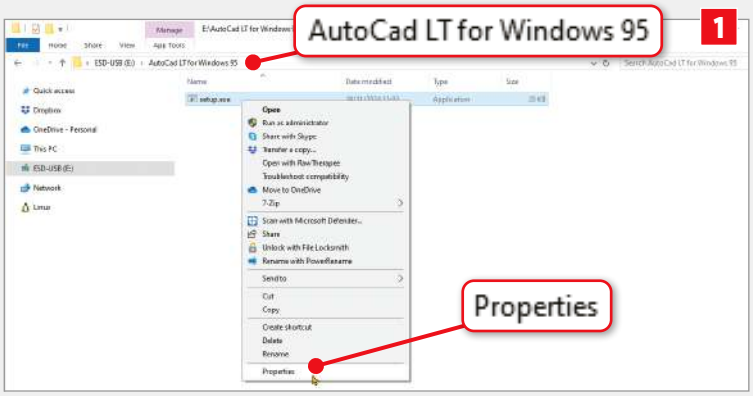
Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Can I run Windows 95 software on my Windows 10 laptop?

Q I've found an old CD-ROM containing AutoCAD LT for Windows 95. Can I install it on my Windows 10 laptop? Should this be done on a virtual machine, which I know little about, or can it be run in legacy mode. Would I also need a copy of Windows 95 to do this?

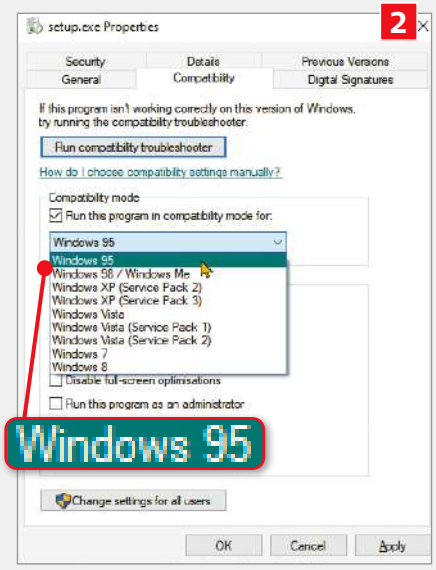
Trevor Taylor



Right-click the 'setup.exe' file on your AutoCAD CD, then choose Properties...

A Sadly, we don't have a copy of this 30-year-old program floating around the *Computeractive* office, so we'll have to talk in general terms. With that in mind, the answer is you should be able to get it to work – but yes, it will almost certainly involve using a virtual machine.

First, you might as well at least try installing it using Windows 10's compatibility mode. We don't actually think this will succeed with something so old, but you've little to lose. So, begin by right-clicking the 'setup.exe' file on your AutoCAD CD, then choose Properties (see screenshot 1). Next, click to select the Compatibility tab and, under the 'Compatibility mode' heading, open the dropdown menu before choosing Windows 95 2. Click OK then double-click the 'setup.exe' file to see how far you get.



...then in the 'Compatibility mode' dropdown menu, choose Windows 95

If it works, great! However, bear in mind that running any old software on modern versions of Windows might lead to unpredictable problems. Aspects of it might not work properly, or it might crash Windows (though any glitches are unlikely to cause any lasting damage to your system).

Otherwise, a virtual machine is your best option – and we suspect this is the path you'll need to follow. For this, we'd suggest VirtualBox, which is a free download from www.virtualbox.org. You will also need a copy of Windows 95.

If you don't have one, you can download it from the Internet Archive, at www.snipca.com/53489 (click the 'ISO IMAGE' link on the right). This isn't strictly legal but in common with many big software companies, Microsoft has long turned a blind eye to the Internet Archive's hosting of ancient tools for preservation purposes – so there's essentially no concern about obtaining Windows 95 from this site.

Next, install VirtualBox and create a new virtual machine, choosing Windows 95 from the Version dropdown menu. You'll need to allocate only minimal resources: VirtualBox's minimum 64MB for memory is more than enough for Windows 95, as is the default 2GB virtual hard drive. VirtualBox Disk Image (VDI) is fine as the virtual drive type, and you can leave it as 'Dynamically allocated' (meaning it won't take up the full 2GB unless needed). At each of the setup steps, click Next or Create, as appropriate.

Next, you need to 'mount' the Windows 95 ISO file as a CD-ROM. In VirtualBox's left-hand pane, click to select your new virtual machine and then click Settings. Now select the Storage tab and, under Storage Devices, click the optical-disc icon. Then, under Attributes, next to Optical Drive, click the optical-disc icon, then navigate to select the Windows 95 ISO file downloaded earlier. Click OK.

You can now open your virtual machine with the Windows 95 installed CD (ISO) 'inserted', so click Start. Go through the setup process and you'll then have a working Windows 95 virtual machine.

Finally, you can insert your AutoCAD LT CD and mount it as you did the Windows 95 ISO file, and then access it from within the Windows 95 virtual machine to install your ancient program – let us know how you get on!

Why can't I write data to my memory stick?

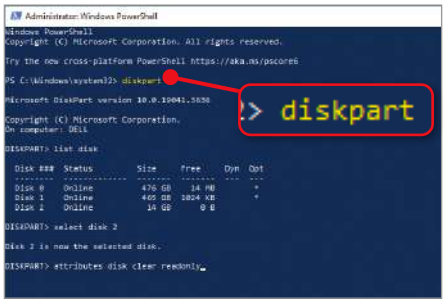
Q One of my memory sticks is warning me that it is 'write protected' and I would like to remove this protection. Please can you tell me how to do this. I have tried following tips on the internet but they just baffle me.

Brian Carrington

A This annoyance sometimes relates to a missing registry value on a PC but, as it's affecting just one of your sticks, the problem must be with that specific device. We don't know when or why, but it's likely that a program you've used with the stick has applied a read-only 'attribute' to prevent data being accidentally wiped.

To fix that, you'll have to use PowerShell, which can be quite daunting. You also need to work very carefully, because the final command you enter will instantly and irreversibly wipe data from the selected drive.

To begin, press Windows key+X then click 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'. At the command prompt, type diskpart (see screenshot) and press Enter. Next, type list disk (with the space) and press Enter. Look at the listed drives and note down the one assigned to your memory card. It's vital you choose the correct drive number, so use the capacity values in the Size column to identify it. Then, type select disk X, where X is the disk number you just noted down – for example, select disk 2.



To remove 'read-only' attribute from a drive type 'diskpart' into PowerShell

Now, type attributes disk clear readonly (with three spaces) and press Enter. Close the PowerShell window, then press Windows key+E to open File Explorer. See if you can access the drive to carry out the desired task (presumably add files to it, or format the stick to wipe it). If so, great: you can stop here.

If not, open PowerShell again and repeat all the steps up to and including select disk X (again replacing X with the relevant disk number). Now enter the list disk command again, and check that there's an asterisk next to your memory stick, indicating it's the selected disk. If so, type clean and press Enter – this will instantly wipe the stick.

Finally, type create partition primary and press Enter. Then, decide which file system you want and type either format fs=ex32 or format fs=NTFS followed by Enter. The latter is best for purely Windows use but, if you're not sure, use format fs=ex32 – because this will work almost as well, but with better compatibility with non-Windows machines.

Where is the hidden Ad Crusher slider in Windscribe?

Q Back in Issue 694's Problems Solved section (page 66), you advised Bob Phillips – who was receiving messages in Chrome to turn off his adblocker – to check if he had an extension like Windscribe installed and, if so, to disable its ad blocker.

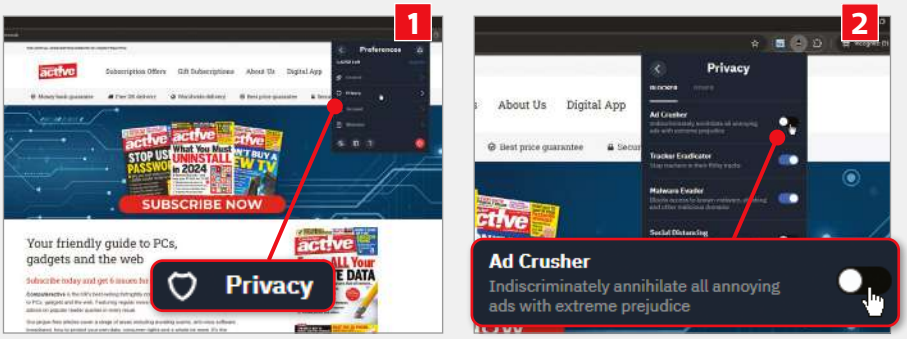
I recently encountered a similar problem and have Windscribe installed – and remembered your reply. So, I went looking for the Ad Crusher slider that you mentioned, but I couldn't find it. I don't imagine you were talking nonsense, as the slider appeared in a screenshot.

Indeed, I've checked on Windscribe's own website, and they talk of this slider. However, it's definitely not available on Windscribe on my laptop. Any idea what's going on here?

Alan Major

A Yes, this is because at some point in the past you've enabled Windscribe's Advanced Mode. This allows more control over the way the extension works, via the tool's underlying uBlock technology, but disables a bunch of 'basic' sliders – such as Ad Crusher.

So, if you're not actually making use of Advanced Mode to manage things manually – and it sounds as though you're not – then we'd suggest disabling it to return to the simpler interface, which includes the Ad Crusher slider.



Block adblocker warnings in Chrome by going into the Privacy settings (1) and disabling Advanced Mode and Ad Crusher (2)

To do this, first open the Windscribe menu (three horizonal lines, top left) then click Privacy (see screenshot 1) . Next, select the Blocker tab, and then switch the Advanced Mode slider to its Off position. Read the warning, then click 'Yes, I'm sure'.

Finally, return to the Blocker tab within Privacy and there you'll find the Ad Crusher slider: just click to switch it off (see screenshot 2).

Can I wipe my laptop without Microsoft account details?

Q I'm looking to do a clean install of Windows on an old laptop before I sell it. I know how to start this process, but I'm aware the installation will request Microsoft account details. How do I bypass this?

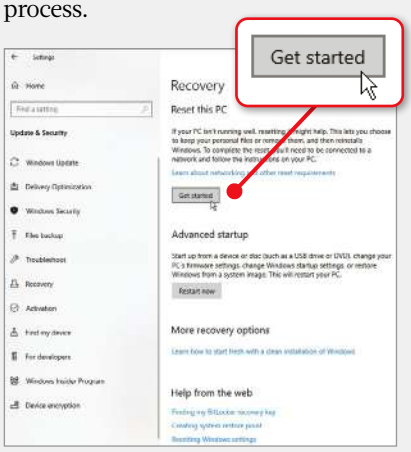
Peter Anderson

A While you're not wrong that a clean install of Windows will eventually ask for Microsoft account details, that's the point at which you'd sell on the laptop – because that happens only *after* it's been wiped.

However, for the benefit of both yourself and other readers, be sure to use the option to securely wipe Windows, just to eliminate the chance of any data being recovered.

First, in Settings, click 'Update & Security' followed by Recovery. Next, under 'Reset this PC', click 'Get started' (see screenshot) followed by 'Remove everything'. To speed things up, choose 'Local reinstall'.

Then – and this is the crucial part – click 'Change settings' and, under 'Clean data', click to flip the slider to its On position. Now click Confirm then continue following the 'Reset this PC' prompts to complete the process.



Reset your PC and remove everything from it before selling it to someone else

Can I switch on my laptop without a power button?

Q My Asus Vivobook Pro 14 laptop's power button now only works intermittently. A local repairman said that because of the way the laptop is made, it would be expensive to replace. I've read that it's possible on some PCs to power up without using the power button? Is this true? I like to put it into Hibernate, but this requires a press of the power button to switch it back on.

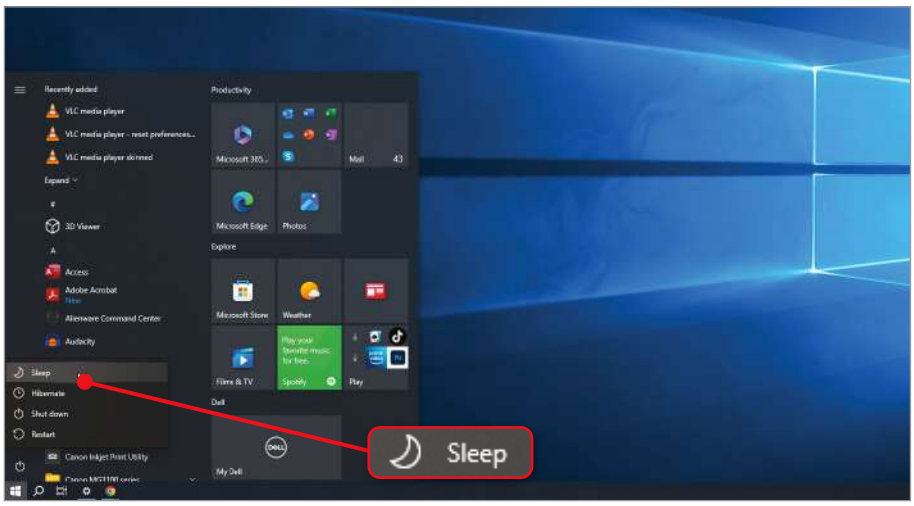
Terry Nicholson

Modern laptops like the Vivobook Pro 14 have designs that make it hard to repair some of their components

A We're afraid your repairman is correct: modern integrated designs means it can be hard or even impossible to physically mend some components.

That aside, when you set your laptop to Hibernate it enters a state where it draws almost zero power and won't respond to keyboard or mouse input. Essentially, it can be woken only by the power button. Some machines can be powered on using a technology known as Wake on LAN (or WoL), whereby the powered-down machine will respond to a special data packet sent across a network. However, this is complicated to configure. Moreover, it requires a second device from which to send the digital trigger – so it's not terribly practical.

Besides, we'd always recommend using Sleep mode instead (see screenshot below): this uses a tiny bit more power, but it allows the machine to wake up with a tap of the keyboard or jiggle of the mouse – and more quickly. Unless your laptop is left untouched and unpowered for days or weeks between uses, the battery is unlikely to run down completely.



Sleep mode uses more power than Hibernate, but lets you wake up your laptop with a tap of the keyboard

Q: What broadband speed do I need to stream Freely?

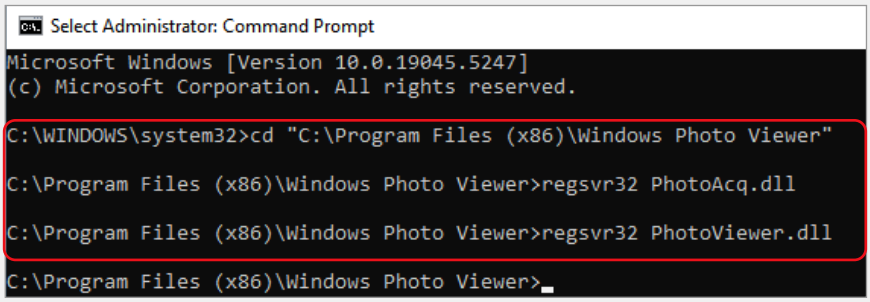
A: Issue 692, page 66 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

Can I restore the 'import picture' option to AutoPlay?

Q Until recently, inserting a memory card into my Windows 10 laptop opened the AutoPlay menu, including an option to import pictures. This allowed me to view thumbnails and select which photos to import directly into the Pictures folder. However, this option has now disappeared, replaced by 'Import using OneDrive'. I don't use online storage and I've removed OneDrive from my PC, and I prefer the previous options. This change seems to be linked to a recent Windows update. Is there any way to restore this very useful feature?

Barrie Lloyd


Select Administrator: Command Prompt
Microsoft Windows [Version 10.0.19045.5247]
(c) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
C:\WINDOWS\system32>cd "C:\Program Files (x86)\Windows Photo Viewer"
C:\Program Files (x86)\Windows Photo Viewer>regsvr32 PhotoAcq.dll
C:\Program Files (x86)\Windows Photo Viewer>regsvr32 PhotoViewer.dll
C:\Program Files (x86)\Windows Photo Viewer>

To restore the import option to Autoplay, type these commands into the Run box

A The option you're talking about is Windows 7's 'Import photos and videos' setting, which relied on that version's Windows Photo Viewer tool. Microsoft now considers both redundant, so they've been hidden by Windows 10 updates. Fortunately, they can be resurrected (at least for now).

First, you need to restore Windows Photo Viewer. To do this, press Windows key+R to open the Run box then type rundll32.exe "C:\Program Files\Windows Photo Viewer\photoAcq.dll",PhotoAndVideoAcquire and press Enter. To avoid mistakes, you can copy this from our Pastebin page (at www.snipca.com/53490) and then paste it into the Run box.

Next, to ensure the relevant import option appears in the AutoPlay menu, you need to run a couple of commands in a Command Prompt or PowerShell window – so press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu then click either 'Command Prompt (Admin)' or 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'. There are three commands to enter, one after the other: cd "C:\Program Files (x86)\Windows Photo Viewer", then regsvr32 PhotoAcq.dll followed by regsvr32 PhotoViewer.dll (see screenshot). These commands are also on the Pastebin page mentioned earlier. Click OK when the RegSvr32 box appears.

Your 'Import photos and videos' option is now restored, as you'll see in the Autoplay section of Devices, within Windows 10 Settings.

Can I control two PCs with one monitor and keyboard?

Q My PC has plenty of storage space and contains a lot of files and programs that I find extremely useful – some of which are no longer available. My PC is fast enough for those tasks that aren't dependent on an internet connection. I'd like to disconnect it from the web, and switch to using a new PC. I believe I can share a monitor and keyboard between my new PC and my old one, but I'm not sure how. Also, if the computer is not connected to the internet is it likely to remain secure?

Geoff Hallsworth

Use a KVM switch, like this VPFET VP-SW200 model, to control multiple PCs with a single monitor/keyboard/mouse set

A You need what's known as a keyboard, video and mouse (or KVM) switch. The pictured VPFET VP-SW200 unit (£30 from www.snipca.com/53486) is typical of this type of device. It's a little box that has a bunch of USB and HDMI inputs and a single HDMI output that will enable any connected USB devices and HDMI inputs to be shared. A single button press, on the unit itself or the desktop-control button that's included with it, will switch control between either the first set of inputs or the second – with the HDMI output also switching at the same time.

So, for example, plug your keyboard and mouse into the USB inputs, and string two HDMI cables from each PC to the KVM box, then a single HDMI cable from the box to your monitor – and you should be good to go.

Finally, any PC disconnected from the internet will be inherently safer than a connected one, but inserting USB sticks and the like still poses some risk.

How can I get back into my old Google account?

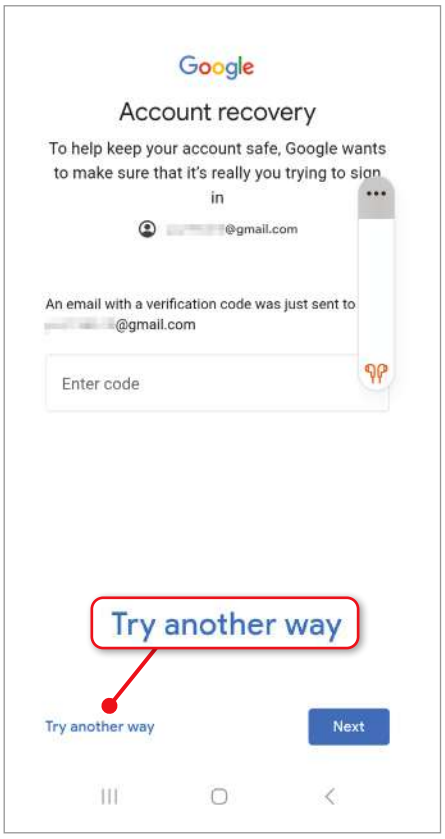
Q I'm trying to regain access to a previous Gmail account, and I've tried the recovery process many times without success. It looks like there's a glitch in the system because it says on my phone screen that Google will send an SMS verification code to my registered phone number (which is the same as my current phone number), but instead the code is sent to the Gmail address that I cannot access – so I'm stuck in a loop. Any ideas?

Darla Wilson

A Google is extremely strict about its account-recovery procedure. The methods it offers are the only ones that exist. That means following the account-recovery procedures, starting at https://accounts.google.com/signin/recovery.

We know you've attempted this a few times, but we do have a couple of suggestions you might try. You sent us a screenshot of the problem, which confirms what you say. However, we're wondering if you noticed the 'Try another way' link (see screenshot). It's possible you missed it when stuck in this frustrating lockout loop. Because it's not a button, it's not obvious that it's tappable. So, tap this link to see what happens: you might find it presents the option to send an SMS.

If this doesn't work we'd advise attempting the process from a different browser or device – and preferably a PC. From your screenshot we can see you're using an Android phone but nothing more. It could be that the manufacturer has modified the browser in some way that's causing this glitch, so trying a different way could break the loop.


Google
Account recovery
To help keep your account safe, Google wants to make sure that it's really you trying to sign in
@gmail.com
An email with a verification code was just sent to @gmail.com
Enter code
Try another way
Try another way
Next

If you're struggling to recover your Google account, try tapping the 'Try another way' link

Why is my laptop making this noise before freezing?

Q My Windows 11 laptop has developed a fault, starting with a surging 'shish, shish, shish' noise just before the mouse freezes. This used to happen about once a week, but now it's almost daily. Restarting the laptop fixes it temporarily, until it starts happening again. Any idea what's wrong?

Bill Junor

A Yes, this is almost certainly because the laptop is overheating. Your laptop is attempting to increase the speed of the cooling fans to compensate but, possibly clogged by dust, they struggle – hence the noise. The processor then does what it's designed to do when it gets too hot, which is to stop dead. Restarting gives the processor time to cool down, so then it's fine again for a little while.

Use a brush or vacuum cleaner to clear dust from any and all visible vents. Perhaps consider removing the back cover for a more thorough clean, if you feel confident enough to do so.

Alternatively – or as well – you could also consider buying a cooling pad like the pictured Tecknet model (£20 from www.snipca.com/53487). This would help keep the underside of the laptop cool, alleviating the problem of overheating.

A cooling pad like this Tecknet model can help to stop your laptop overheating

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Captive and open Wi-Fi hotspots?

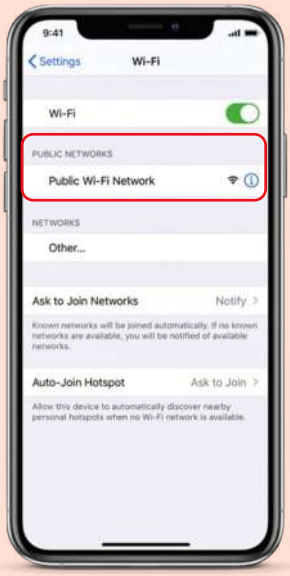
Q Whenever I'm out and about I sometimes connect to public Wi-Fi hotspots, partly for a quicker connection and partly to save my mobile data. I tend to rely on those I trust, such as the one at my local council library. I noticed that when I log on to this, my iPhone labels it 'Captive Wi-Fi'. I wonder what this means.

I have to fill in a few personal details before I can use it. I don't mind because I trust my library, but why is this necessary? And is this a safer hotspot than others I might use?

Sandra Folkes

A No public Wi-Fi hotspot is completely safe, though some are certainly riskier than others. The first half of that statement is an important caveat to everything else we're about to explain and should always be kept in mind.

In simple terms, a 'captive' hotspot is one where the provider requires you to interact in some way before you can make use of it. This typically means providing your name and email address, and ticking a box to agree to terms and conditions. You might even need to create an account. It all depends on how the provider has designed its service.



There's no guarantee of privacy when using public Wi-Fi hotspots

By contrast, an 'open' Wi-Fi hotspot doesn't put up any barriers to connection: if you can see it, you can connect to it. It is this ease of access that makes open hotspots a riskier prospect. It's always tempting to opt for the quickest possible connection. However, an open hotspot could be operated by any wrongdoer sitting nearby, and perhaps he's named it 'Council Library' precisely to lure unsuspecting surfers. He could do this with just a smartphone.

Setting up and operating captive hotspots requires significantly more effort. In this regard, at least, a captive hotspot – such as that provided by your library – is likely to be legitimate. That said, it is still possible for a hacker to create a captive hotspot, so encountering one is no guarantee of safety.

In short, captive or otherwise, there's no guarantee of privacy when using public Wi-Fi hotspots – so, wherever possible, stick to using your 4G or 5G connection.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

How do I standardise my videos' volume levels?

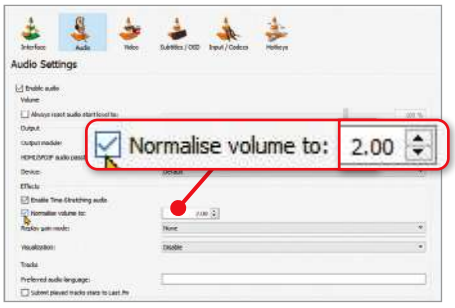
Q I have a 1TB hard drive containing a lot of my videos. My problem is that the volume level on each video file is different. Some are MPEG, while others are MKV or AVI. Is there a program that can process all the videos in each folder so they have the same volume level, without me having to sit there and process them one by one? Thanks in advance, and I love your magazine – even down here in Australia!

Earl Pilkington

A Yes, you can do this with the FFmpeg tool (a free download from www.ffmpeg.org). However, the process itself can be very complicated, as can FFmpeg itself. This is because it's a command-line-style tool. Moreover, the precise method and commands depends on many factors. Your starting point is the documentation section of the FFmpeg website (www.snipca.com/53488).

If you'd prefer a Windows-style tool then Shutter Encoder (www.shutterencoder.com) is basically FFmpeg with a friendlier user interface. You need to select your videos, open the 'Choose function' menu, pick one of the 'Sound conversion' formats then tick the 'Audio normalization' box (see screenshot above) before clicking 'Start function'. However, be aware that this process could take many minutes or even hours per video.

If you use the popular VLC tool (www.videolan.org) to watch videos, open the Tools menu and choose Preferences. Next click to select the Audio tab and, under Effect, tick the 'Normalise volume to:' box (see screenshot above right) before clicking Save.



Standardise your videos' volume levels using Shutter Encoder (above) or VLC (right)

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 12 Mar

- Why can't I print attachments?
- How do I lock my laptop?
- How do I kill this frustrating Chrome button?

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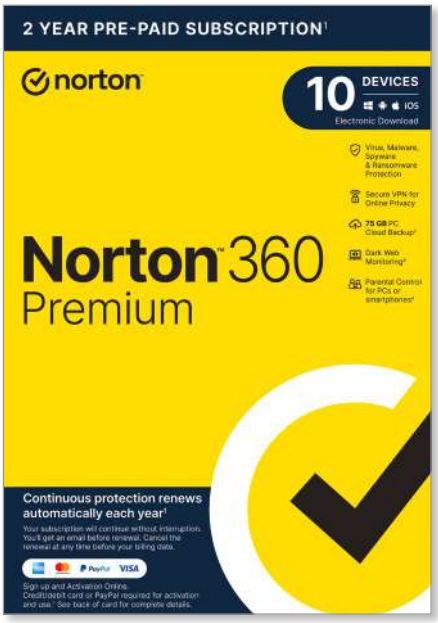

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Reader Support

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Is it illegal to warn about speed cameras?

Q I was intrigued to read in Issue 701 (page 45) that Google Maps lets drivers warn other motorists about police presence. Most of the options seem fine, but I believe the 'Mobile speed camera' option may be illegal. Traditionally, this has involved drivers using their horn or flashing their lights to warn about police activity. This is illegal under section 89 of the Police Act 1997, and can lead to a fine of up to £1,000. Can you clarify please?

Graham Rice

A You're correct about section 89 of the Police Act 1997, which cites "giving a warning to other motorists of a police speed trap ahead" as an example of the criminal offence caused when an individual "wilfully obstructs a constable in the execution of their duty".

Separately, the Highway Code has a rule that says you must "not flash your headlights to convey any other message or intimidate other road users". Crucially, however, these don't mention GPS navigation apps, Google Maps or similar. For the time being, this is likely to be one of those tech grey areas where UK law hasn't caught up with tech.

What we can be certain of is that, while you're driving, it's illegal to hold and use your phone, satnav or any other device that can send or receive data.

Would I need to keep my modem to connect to new router?

Q I've been wanting to get rid of my old router for some time, so was interested in Issue 701's Cover Feature explaining what you should use instead. Although I have Fibre-to-the-Cabinet (FTTC) broadband, my phone line connects to the router through ADSL via an RJ11 plug with a microfilter. My understanding is that the ISP-provided device has an built-in modem and router.

Hub Manager
Home > Advanced settings > Advanced wireless
Changes need to be saved
Configuration
My discs
Save
Back
All wireless functionality on your Hub has been completely disabled.
To re-enable wireless on your Hub, set the 'Disable all wireless' switch to 'No'.
Disable all wireless: YES
Disable all wireless: YES

You can use your old ISP router as a standalone modem by disabling all Wi-Fi functionality

The routers you recommended all have WAN ports to connect, suggesting they don't have built-in modems. So, do I need to retain my old modem/router to connect to the new router, thereby defeating the object of the exercise. Can you clarify this?

Ian MacLachlan

A We've had a number of similar letters, so here's a full explanation. Basically, the need for a modem comes down to the type of broadband you have. Full-fibre (FTTP) broadband doesn't need a modem. When an ISP's engineers set up a full-fibre connection, they usually install a small box that brings the optical cable into your home from the street. This box then connects directly to the WAN port of your router, via an Ethernet cable.

However, if you still have traditional DSL or FTTC broadband, you'll need a DSL modem. Most ISP-provided routers come with a built-in modem, but most third-party routers – including the models in our Cover Feature – do not. So, if you wanted to upgrade to one of these routers, you'd need a separate modem, connected to the router's WAN port.

Instead of buying a separate modem, you could simply reuse your old ISP router with its Wi-Fi functionality turned off, so that it effectively works as a standalone modem. The precise method will depend on the make and model. But on a BT Smart Hub, for instance, log into the router's configuration tool, open 'Advanced settings' (logging in with your admin password when prompted), click 'Wireless', then switch the 'Disable all wireless' setting to Yes (see screenshot above).

Does WebBrowserPassView work in Windows 11?

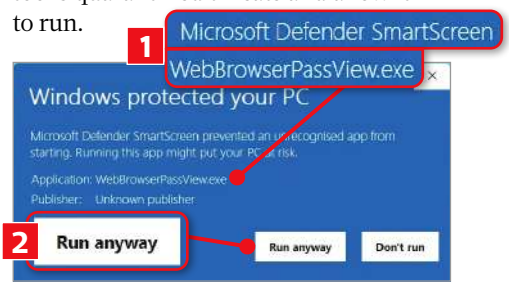
Q Am I right in thinking that NirSoft's WebBrowserPassView (www.snipca.com/53080), which you recommended in Issue 700 (page 20) won't run properly in Windows 11? If that's the case, is there anything that does a similar job?

John Bevan

A In fact, WebBrowserPassView does run in Windows 11, even though it's not listed among the supported versions on the tool's download page. However, the tool can be somewhat fiddly to launch, which may be why it hasn't worked for you.

As we mention Issue 700, you'll need to enter a password (wbpv28821@) in order to even unzip the download. Microsoft's SmartScreen might also block it (1 in our screenshot below), but it's completely safe so click 'More info', then 'Run anyway' 2.

You may also find that your security software falsely identifies the program as malware and quarantines it. If this happens, just navigate to your security tool's quarantined threats and allow it to run.



Click 'More info', then 'Run anyway' if you see this warning about WebBrowserPassView

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

Administrator Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

ADSL Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. A technology that converts a standard phone line into a broadband internet connection.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

API (or Platform) Application Programming Interface. A system built into a program so that other programs can work with it.

ARM Advanced RISC Machine. Processors that are more energy-efficient and are used in more devices than those made by AMD and Intel.

ASHA American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

AV1 An open-source format for compressing videos. Can be used on a wide range of devices.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

Buffering Downloading a certain amount of data before starting to play a video. Can cause delays to your streaming.

Cast To send content from your PC to TV.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users, especially over the internet. Typically used to offer automated customer support.

Clean install An operating system installation that overwrites all other content on the hard drive.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Command line A way to control a computer by typing instructions one at a time. In Windows this is called Command Prompt.

Compatibility mode A setting in Windows that allows you to run programs that would otherwise only run in older versions of Windows. Not all programs will work with this mode, though.

Contrast ratio A measure of the difference between the darkest and lightest possible shades shown by a screen. Screens with higher contrast ratios are good for watching movies or playing games.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website log-in details and so on.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website log-in details and so on.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

CSV Comma Separated Value. A standard file format, used for storing information in tables, that can be opened by most spreadsheet programs.

Data packet A small unit of data sent across a network, such as an email attachment or part of a streamed video.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

Denial of service To attack a website by overloading it with requests, preventing it from working properly.

DHCP Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol. A system where one device on a network, normally the router, distributes network addresses to the others on request.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Differential backup A data backup that copies only the files that have changed since the last full backup was performed.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

DNS Domain Name System. A technology that associates computers with their addresses on the internet.

Dolby Audio Dolby's sound-processing technology for enhancing clarity, depth and volume in digital audio.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality, or the size an object will be shown on screen.

DRM Digital Rights Management. Software that limits the copying of a file.

DSL Digital Subscriber Line. A type of internet connection that uses existing telephone lines to deliver broadband service.

Dual boot To set up a PC with two operating systems, so that one must be chosen each time it starts.

Efficiency core Processors used for background tasks that run constantly but don't require much processing power.

EQ/Equaliser Like the tone controls on a hi-fi, an equaliser changes the tone of music produced by a computer or portable player.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows. Has the file extension .exe.

Factory settings The original system state of an electronic device. You can restore a device to this state by erasing all of the information stored on it and returning its software to its original manufacturer settings.

Firmware Basic software stored on hardware, such as a processor, to control its operation.

FTP File Transfer Protocol. A system for transferring files between computers. Often used when uploading websites.

FTTC Fibre-to-the-cabinet. A broadband technology that uses fibre-optic cable between a phone exchange and street cabinets before transferring to the normal telephone wires.

Full HD Resolution of 1920x1080 pixels.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second. 1GHz is equal to 1,000MHz.

GIF Graphics Interchange Format. A type of image file often used on the web, but now largely superseded by PNG.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GitHub A place where software developers can share code, and where users can download programs. Owned by Microsoft.

Gorilla glass Scratch-resistant glass that's used to protect the screens of tablets and phones.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR10+ High-dynamic range 10. Current industry standard for TVs.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet, either free or for a fee.

HTTPS Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure. The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

Image stabilisation A mechanism built into digital cameras that compensates for any shaking or vibrations that occur during shooting.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history, so other people using your computer can't see which sites you've visited.

Incremental backup A backup method that saves only data modified since the last backup.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

ISBN International Standard Book Number. A 10- or 13-digit code used to identify books.

ISO file A type of image file that contains data from a CD or DVD.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

LAN Local-area network. A computer network in one place, such as a home or office.

Layers Image-editing programs let users create multiple layers. Think of these like layers of glass stacked on top of the canvas, which can be drawn on, re-ordered or hidden.

LLM Large language model. A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

Macro An automated series of commands or options that can be run at any time. Handy if you often need to perform repetitive actions.

Meme Something online that spreads quickly, typically videos, photos or catchphrases.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

Microfilter Lets your broadband work at the same time as your phone service.

MIL-STD-810H A US military standard that tests how durable devices like phones and laptops are under extreme conditions.

MKV Matroska. An open-source type of video file. Matroska is a container format so it can contain many types of audio, video and even text for subtitles.

MP4 A type of digital movie file often used for portable players.

MPEG Motion Picture Experts Group. Describes a method of compressing digital video. MPEG1 compression gives VHS-quality video, while MPEG2 compression gives high-quality video with CD-quality sound. MPEG2 compression is used for DVD movies.

NFC Near-field communication. A technology that allows two devices to communicate by being touched together or placed near to each other.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Picture-in-picture Shows video in a small moveable screen while you browse the web or watch TV.

PowerShell A Windows tool for automating commands.

Product key A unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on. Its capacity is measured in megabytes (MB): the more memory your PC has, the more things it can process simultaneously and the faster it will seem.

Read speed How long it takes a hard drive to 'read' data, and respond to it.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn. Slight changes in the image each time it is updated combine to give the illusion of movement. For a steady image, the higher the refresh rate, the less flicker you will see. A refresh rate over 85Hz is generally accepted as being flicker-free.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer so that it can be resold and reused.

Registry key The Windows Registry equivalent of a folder.

RJ-11 Registered Jack-11. The type of small plug and socket used by modems to connect to a telephone socket. A converter plug is needed before an RJ-11 cable can be plugged into a standard UK telephone socket (RJ-11 is a US standard).

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones. The SIM card carries the user's identity and phone number for accessing the network.

SIM-only A phone package in which you pay only for the data, calls and texts. You have to buy the phone yourself.

SMS Short Message Service. More commonly called text messaging.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than traditional hard drives.

Switch Allows more than one PC to be connected to a wired network.

System restore point The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date and time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

Thread Smallest sequence of instructions that can be managed by your processor. PCs consist of multiple threads.

Tooltip A small message that appears when the cursor hovers over an option.

Transition A way of joining two video clips together or moving from one clip to another. Common examples include wipes, dissolves and cutting to black.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a code sent to your phone in addition to a password.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2 Faster successors to USB.

VESA Video Electronics Standards Association. A standard mount for attaching monitors on to stands, walls and PCs.

Virtual machine A software-based computer running inside another computer. Often used to emulate another operating system – for example, running Windows 7 as a virtual machine inside Windows 10.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAN Wide Area Network. Exists over a large geographical area.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows desktop.

Write speed How long it takes a hard drive to save data.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

Easy when you

Know How

Intrigued by the controversial new Chinese chatbot, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Test DeepSeek AI safely

When I was at school, there was a brief but frenzied craze for clackers. As you may recall, this toy consisted of two heavy plastic balls connected by a string, which made a 'clacking' sound when swung around and banged together. The teachers regarded clackers as a dangerous menace, and banned them before they took someone's eye out.

Ollama provides a private way to use DeepSeek by running it in a PowerShell window

> Thankfully I'd only offended DeepSeek in a private, local version

For some reason, I thought of clackers when I read about the fuss surrounding DeepSeek. As we explained in Issue 703 (page 49), this new Chinese AI tool has raised widespread privacy concerns, been described as a 'severe' safety risk (www.snipca.com/53712) and is already banned in Italy and by US government agencies.

When something apparently innocuous is flagged as hazardous, it increases my temptation to try it – just like clackers. So I wondered how I could test DeepSeek without compromising my privacy and security.

The obvious answer was to access DeepSeek in a virtual machine, to isolate it from the rest of my PC. But that would involve downloading VirtualBox and a Windows ISO file, setting up the virtual machine and installing the operating system – just to visit the DeepSeek website. I'd then need to sign up with DeepSeek using a fake email address to avoid revealing any personal information.

Instead, I turned to a free program called LM Studio (www.snipca.com/53714), which runs AI language-learning models (LLMs), including DeepSeek, locally on your PC. Because it works offline, there's no risk of your data being shared in the background.

I installed the Windows version of LM Studio and clicked 'Get your first LLM'. DeepSeek was already selected – or rather, a 'distilled' version called Qwen 7B, which was still a hefty 4.68GB in size.

Once the LLM had downloaded, I clicked Start New Chat to get acquainted with the contentious Chinese chatbot. I chose DeepSeek in the 'Select your model' menu and clicked Load Model. To verify I was really using DeepSeek, I asked it to tell me about Tiananmen Square. Sure enough, as other users have discovered, rules imposed by the Chinese Communist Party forbade it from answering.

I then entered the query 'What are clackers?', which left DeepSeek mystified, even when I hinted it was a type of toy. I had more luck with the simpler question 'How do I roast a chicken', which produced an impressively detailed response. But when I asked 'What is DeepSeek?', it suggested I'd made a typing error. It was also extremely slow, taking ages to 'think' of answers and guzzling over 5GB of RAM in the process.

Tired of this sluggish and unhelpful assistant, I quit LLM Studio and downloaded the alternative free tool Ollama (www.snipca.com/53718). This runs via the command line, and its localised versions of AI models use fewer resources.

Ollama opened in PowerShell, where – as instructed on its website (www.snipca.com/53719) – I typed the command ollama run deepseek-r1:1.5b (see screenshot – copy from our Pastebin account at www.snipca.com/53720) to install the smallest (1.1GB) DeepSeek model. I then asked the million-yuan question about Tiananmen Square. Again, DeepSeek refused to answer, but unlike in LM Studio it at least explained why: "The topic of Tiananmen Square has long been a matter of debate and controversy in China". More importantly, it only took a few seconds to respond.

Enquiring about clackers produced a curt reply and a follow-up explanation that 'clackers' is a "derogatory term" in Chinese internet culture. Thankfully I'd only offended DeepSeek in a private, local version, rather than its data-sharing online tool, so wasn't about to trigger a diplomatic incident.

Once we'd moved past this awkward interchange, I chatted freely with DeepSeek, though this felt a bit boring in a PowerShell window. The proper version presumably gives better-quality information, but until the privacy concerns are addressed I'll stick with ChatGPT – which, incidentally, provided a perfect explanation of clackers.

Need help with AI tools? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to remove junk from his streaming stick

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